Yu-Gi-Oh! VRAINS: Divine Record

By: Frost190

At the age of 7, Kento Hijiri was kidnapped. Ten years later, Kento receives an anonymous package containing an avatar and coordinate that leads him to the destroyed Cyberse World where he encounters a Duelist who urges him to fight alongside Playmaker if he wants to move on from his past. Taking the name Holysaber, Kento's battle begins. OC insert and partial rewrite.

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AUTHOR'S ANNOUNCEMENT

Hello, everyone.

Frost190 here.

It's finally here! My first *Yu-Gi-Oh! VRAINS* fanfic series! For those who have read the prologue oneshot *Divine Record: Prologue* should already know a bit about this fanfic. For those who haven't read the prologue chapter, I recommend reading it first before starting this story.

For those who also read my ARC-V stories, I initially had planned to publish this story after finishing my ARC-V fanfic, *The Last Supreme King Dragon*, but ideas for this fanfic kept popping out one after another to the point that I had written down the ideas and summaries from the very first down to the very last chapter. I also gained new ideas for the final arc of *The Last Supreme King Dragon* and would like to incorporate those ideas, so some careful considerations must be made. I couldn't concentrate on writing *The Last Supreme King Dragon*, and thus, I decided to put *The Last Supreme King Dragon* on hold and start this fanfic instead because I'm worried that forcing myself to continue writing *The Last Supreme King Dragon* would only lessen the quality of the writing.

I was inspired to write this story after reading and following **scififan599** 's VRAINS fanfic, *Yu-Gi-Oh! VRAINS: Hidden Memories* . Like *Hidden Memories*, this story follows an OC I made, Kento Hijiri, who is the seventh victim of the Lost Incident. But mind you, unlike *Hidden Memories* that changed the number of children from 6 to 8, I only add Kento and no more.

This story will be following the anime's flow but there'll be some changes, a partial rewrite to the anime. Partial as in not everything

like I did with ARC-V. I'll skip certain moments or Duels that I believe don't need changing. I already decided how many chapters this story would be and this is definite. No changing. As I told you, I already wrote down the whole summary of each chapter from beginning to the end along with the cards, Duels, characters, etc. For my update schedule, I can't promise a quick update, it depends on my real-life work and other matters. I'll still try to find time to continue writing.

The name of the characters and the cards will follow the Japanese names. Although for the cards, I might use the TCG names depending on my preference.

I decided to start the story from Season 2 because I don't have many qualms with Season 1 of VRAINS anime, nor do I have many things that I want to change in the first season. Plus, I found it easier to incorporate OC characters into the story starting from Season 2.

I promise that characters like Jin, Miyu, the Ignis would play more roles later in the story. The female characters won't be neglected and will get their moments to shine. This story will also have an original story arc that is not in the anime.

Now, I present you *Yu-Gi-Oh! VRAINS: Divine Record!*

CHAPTER 1

Blade of Hope - Holysaber

(Kibou no Yaiba "Hōrīseibā")

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5 Years Ago

It was a beautiful green meadow. The grass flattened under the wind in beautiful shimmering waves, each blade turned momentarily to

reflect brilliant moonlight, catching the light in a way that shows it isn't one green but many. The vast night sky filled with stars, giving a sense of warmth springing from the cold.

One wouldn't expect at first glance that this meadow and the night sky was entirely made of data.

In the meadow, lies a small humanoid being with pointed top and clown shoe-like feet. He has markings over his purple-tinted black body, in the shape of thin lines and circles, which are tinted with a purple color. He has oval-shaped, yellow-orange eyes. Lying next to him was a deep, purple-colored round-shaped creature without hands and only a pair of feet with an arrow-shaped tail.

Both were staring at the starry sky, enjoying the beautiful view of thousands of stars. One of those stars seemed to glow brighter than all the rest, and then it slid through the sky, falling. The humanoid being then closed his eyes, spreadeagled on the grass asleep.

"Having a fun time slacking off, Dark Ignis?"

The voice jolted him awake.

"Argh!" He yelled, sitting up before turning to the one who called out to him.

It was another humanoid being, but with an oval-shaped head with five strands pointing down in resemblance of hair and boot-like legs. He has markings in the shape of thin lines and a wing-shaped marking on his chest over his silver-tinted white body. His eyes were diamond-shaped and arctic blue in color. Next to him was a creature with white fur, green hands and feet, a pair of purple eyes, and a golden halo above its head.

"Don't scare me like that, Divine Ignis!" Dark Ignis protested, scratching his head self-consciously. "How did you even know that I am here?"

"Asking the monsters." Divine Ignis answered like it was the most obvious answer.

"Right… your ability to communicate with monsters is veeery convenient~" Dark Ignis said with sarcastic tone.

"Everyone is having a meeting right now. Though Flame Ignis and Wind Ignis said that your presence won't be necessary since you'll just be lazing around again anyway, Water Ignis and I beg to differ. How about taking things seriously for once?" Divine Ignis told him with a scolding tone.

"Even without me, everyone is doing a fine job. Just have your meeting without me." Dark Ignis dismissed his friend, "Better yet, why don't you two join us? Let's play at the waterfall like yesterday!"

"No can do. This meeting seems very important, so skipping is not an option. Right, Saint Kuriboh?" Divine Ignis immediately refused, and Saint Kuriboh also nodded.

"Boo! You've been busy lately. You've been going out of Cyberse World, checking how the outside world is and observing humans. It won't hurt to skip one or two meetings! You're the only one who likes to play with me and Linkuriboh." Dark Ignis pouted.

"Rikuriku!" Linkuriboh responded in agreement.

Ever since they created their world, Dark Ignis always let his brethren do all the work while he just played around. As a result, he wasn't well-liked by the other Ignis (according to his own words), except one. Divine Ignis was the only one who's willing to hang out with him whenever he had free time. Most of his interactions with the rest other than Divine Ignis were him being lectured, or him pulling a prank or being pranked by other Ignis.

"Perhaps the others would be more willing to spend time with you if you do even just a little bit of your work." Divine Ignis replied with a sigh at his friend's reluctance but took a seat next to the Dark Ignis.

"Why are you visiting the outside world and observing humans anyway? What's the fun in that?" Dark Ignis asked. He couldn't comprehend the curiosity that Divine Ignis has for humans. He and the other Ignis were already satisfied enough to live peacefully in their home world, having no interest whatsoever in humans. However, Divine Ignis was different. On a regular basis, he would sometimes leave for a while to the outside world and observe humans before returning.

"We were created to become the successor of humanity. Is it not natural to be curious of humans who we are supposed to guide? Each one of us is also based on a human, aren't we?" Divine Ignis answered, looking up at the sky, mind drifted to the humans he had been observing all these years, especially the one whom he was based on.

"Did you meet humans when going outside? Like your Origin, maybe?" Dark Ignis asked, now curious what else his friend did when he was out. When someone becomes curious, they're bound to try out things with their own hands. Of course, Dark Ignis didn't really believe that his friend would go as far as speaking directly to a human-

"Yes, I met a human, but not my Origin." Divine Ignis confirmed, shocking the other Ignis.

"You did?! Who!? Why?!" Dark Ignis asked, leaning his face closer as he demanded an answer. He never thought a day would come for an Ignis to interact directly with a human.

Divine Ignis went lost in thought, not answering the Dark Ignis' question for a moment. He then pushed Dark Ignis' face away from him, making sure his personal space wasn't invaded anymore before turning to his friend and finally spoke,

"It's…"

GRRRRRR

A growling sound halted them. The earth trembled, prompting Dark Ignis to stand up. Linkuriboh and Saint Kuriboh ran in circles, making a panicking noise.

"W-what's going on?! Why is there an earthquake?!" Dark Ignis looked around them in confusion as the earthquake hadn't stopped.

The starry sky above them cracked. From the cracks, two gigantic black dragons emerged. They didn't have limbs and were more like serpents. They have six arrow-like protrusions, three on top of its body and three below, each connected to neon-green spheres that seemed to serve as its wings.

The dragons opened their mouths, each unleashing a stream of flames that burned their surroundings. The meadow and the forest not too far that were once so alive in a matter of seconds have been rendered lifeless sticks of charcoal, no more vibrant than the old lampposts in the city. The fire burns like a temper, as if the leaping flames have a terrible anger toward the world they were living in.

"Oh my God! What the heck is that?!" Dark Ignis began to flail as he witnessed the meadow that he loved started to be burned to ashes.

"We're under attack! Come on, we must go help the others!" Divine Ignis took Dark Ignis by his left wrist and pulled him up, flying in the direction where the rest of their friends were gathering.

"Linkuriboh go the cave at the waterfall! Hide there until it's safe!" Dark Ignis told his Kuriboh who could only watch in dismay as its master left, but still followed the order given. Saint Kuriboh, on the other hand, returned to Divine Ignis' Deck.

Everything happened so fast. When they realized it, the ground beneath them was broken apart, and lava spewed forth from them. Massive parts of their home had been consumed by magma and the once starry night sky was now tainted with nothing but black clouds. Then, they saw it. The tower where all the Ignis were supposed to gather for their meeting. One of the black dragons circled around the

tower and there was a red circle resembling a magic circle with five white spheres, four at each side and one at the center.

From the sphere at the bottom left, an Ignis with a light lemon-yellow body with dandelion yellow diamond markings came out.

"The Knights of Hanoi are attacking the Cyberse World!" He exclaimed while trying to move his body.

"But we're trapped, so we can't fight back!" Another Ignis stated distressfully. He has a massive build and has bistre-brown markings all over his ultra-orange bulky body.

"That's… !" The blue female Ignis with twin pigtails that levitated from her head that was trapped in the sphere at the center noticed Dark Ignis and Divine Ignis were coming.

"Thanks for waiting! The saviors have arrived!" Dark Ignis announced his and Divine Ignis' arrival with triumphant tone. The Divine Ignis, on the other hand, looked at them worriedly.

"The Knights of Hanoi did this? Why…?! I don't understand… Why would Dr. Kogami…" Divine Ignis said in disbelief.

"Oh my! You're all trapped? Good thing we didn't attend the meeting." Dark Ignis referred to himself and Divine Ignis. It was fortunate that they didn't attend the meeting. Otherwise, they would've been trapped along with them at the enemies' mercy.

"Divine Ignis, can you free them from the trap?" Dark Ignis asked.

"I could but it'll take a while. I don't think the Knights of Hanoi would give us the time to free our friends." Divine Ignis said with regretful tone. It frustrated him that he couldn't do anything to save their friends.

"Then we only have one choice to save everyone!" Dark Ignis faced the Divine Ignis. In their situation, they only have one way to get

them out of this dire situation. Without needing to be told, Divine Ignis understood what Dark Ignis was telling him.

"So be it then." Divine Ignis reluctantly agreed.

"Here we go!"

Dark Ignis and Divine Ignis flew up until they were out of the Cyberse World. Together, the two of them began cutting off the signal between their home world and the outside world. On the bright side, this would keep their home world and their friends safe from the threat of Knights of Hanoi. The downside, however, is that they wouldn't be able to return to their home world. Considering how their friends were trapped and the two of them were the only ones who could move, there was no other option if they wanted to save everyone.

"Piece of cake!" Dark Ignis said proudly.

However, they didn't have time to celebrate yet. One of the dragons came at them, opening its mouth to devour the two Ignis.

"Watch out!" Dark Ignis pushed Divine Ignis out of the way, causing the dragon to eat his body save for one eyeball.

"Dark Ignis!" Divine Ignis yelled in terror as he watched his friend become nothing more than an eyeball. He was about to reach out to him until the Dark Ignis shouted at him.

"Go! We must split up! It'll be more difficult for them to find us if we split up!" Dark Ignis told him. Immediately after he did so, he went the other way, silently telling his friend they must go their separate ways.

Divine Ignis could understand the logic of his suggestion, but the thought of leaving his friend who has been reduced to a mere eyeball left a bad taste. Still, he knew he mustn't let his emotions get

the better of him. For now, they'll be separated, but one day, he knows they'll meet again.

"Dammit!" Divine Ignis cursed before making his escape toward the opposite direction of the Dark Ignis.

Witnessing the two Ignis went their separate ways, the man who commanded for the Cyberse World's destruction clicked his tongue. He was a man with dark crimson hair and red highlights clicked his tongue. His ears were pierced with Egyptian-style earrings with a blue diamond and a gold bullet "token". He wore a tan-colored visor giving him yellow featureless eyes, designed with a white casing and a diamond-shaped pattern of white dots with red centers, linked together by a white circle that surrounds a white dot in the center of his forehead that suggests the barrel of a gun.

"Track them down! Only those two Ignis knows the Cyberse World's location!" He ordered.

"Wait, Revolver!"

A man yelled out from behind. A tall man, who has fair skin, black and grey hair and mustache, and a pair of yellow eyes. He wears a white coat with red outlines, a dark undershirt with red stripes, some black pants and a pair of brown shoes.

"Forget about the Divine Ignis. Focus our resources on tracking the Dark Ignis instead. In his current state, he's easier to deal with. We'll worry about the Divine Ignis later." The man instructed. The younger man, Revolver, seemed confused but obeyed the order.

"Change of plan! Forget the Divine Ignis, track down the Dark Ignis! Don't let it get away!" Revolver gave out the order, turning the attention fully to the direction where the Dark Ignis escaped to.

The older man closed his eyes, fingers holding the spot between his eyebrows.

"Are you all right, Dr. Kogami?"

A young man appeared from behind. He has pale blond hair with the left side of his face covered by a black and red colored eye-mask. His attire consists of a red shirt girded with large green material, a red bow tie made of string around his neck, and a belt. He also wears a white rib-length jacket with green patterns and sleeves that end between his wrists and elbows.

"Galehaut." Dr. Kogami addressed the younger man.

"You don't look well, Dr. Kogami." Galehaut replied with a concerned voice.

"Yes. I was a bit frustrated because we were so close to destroy them." Dr. Kogami said with a disappointed sigh. "But I can't say I didn't expect this. While Dark Ignis was a surprise, I had expected that Divine Ignis could pull out such a trick."

"Pardon if I am wrong, but to me, it sounds like you think highly of Divine Ignis' capabilities." Galehaut had listened to Dr. Kogami talking about the Ignis many times before. However, this was the first time he spoke about a particular Ignis that way.

"Indeed. It is as you said. I believe that Divine Ignis is different from the rest of the Ignis. He is created from *that* extraordinary data I got after all." Dr. Kogami emphasized. Without naming the so-called data, he and his assistants would know what data he was talking about.

"The only being capable of creating Divine-Attribute cards. Even after much extensive research we've done, we couldn't make a single copy of those cards." Galehaut must admit that he is amazed by Divine Ignis. He managed to create a brand-new Attribute that has never been seen before. Not only that, but the creation of those cards was also so complex even for Dr. Kogami's intellect that attempts they tried to make one only resulted in bugs. It's no wonder that Dr. Kogami paid attention to Divine Ignis in particular.

"You believe the capabilities that Divine Ignis holds, so shouldn't that be all the more reason to chase after him as well? Won't it be dangerous if we leave him be?" Galehaut asked.

"He is not a fool. No matter how powerful and intelligent he is, we have more advantage in numbers. He won't do something foolish like confronting us head on with so much for him at stake." Dr. Kogami is aware that neither Ignis would be willing to take a risk of exposing themselves into danger since not only them, their Ignis brethern lives are also at stake. They also know that as their creator, he is capable of using their algorithm and use it against them, making it even riskier should they confront Knights of Hanoi.

Revolver approached the two of them. Judging from the frown on his face, he most likely has failed.

"I'm sorry, Father. Even though he has weakened, Dark Ignis still managed to get away from us." Revolver apologized to Dr. Kogami, looking down in shame.

"By now, Divine Ignis would've already hidden himself away. It'll be a waste of time to look for him. Dark Ignis, on the other hand, is weakened because he partially lost his data. He won't be able to hide as efficiently as the Divine Ignis. We'll get his tail sooner or later if we regularly observe the network." Dr. Kogami looked at several screens that show various network domains, looking for any sign of an Ignis.

"Still, if we somehow found a clue about Divine Ignis, we'll attack and make him spill out the location of the Cyberse World. Just inform me beforehand when you find a clue about Divine Ignis. Never act on your own without my permission." Dr. Kogami instructed his son and Galehaut.

"Understood." Revolver and Galehaut replied.

"Continue observing SOL Technologies and report their movements. They'll learn about the escaping Ignis soon and try to get ahold of

them. We mustn't let them get the Ignis before us. Relay what I told you to Faust, Baira, Dr. Genome, and Specter."

Revolver and Galehaut obeyed, leaving the place to carry out their given orders.

Being left alone, Dr. Kogami looks at the screen showing the replay footage of Divine Ignis and Dark Ignis making their escape after they hid the Cyberse World. Staring at them, his eyes glint with guilt. His heart aches at the thought of having to destroy his own creations.

However, the results of the simulations he had done were absolute. To prevent the extinction of mankind, the Ignis must be destroyed at all costs. As their creator, it's his responsibility to see through their end now that he realized his dream would never come to fruition.

"There is no other choice. This is the only way to save humanity…"

Den City Cemetery - Den City - 5 Years Later (Present Day)

At first sight, Den City Cemetery seemed no different from other Japanese cemeteries in general. It was located near a shrine and a temple. Gravestones feature vertical columns made from black or grey stone with only names written on them. At the base of a gravestone, you will find vases for flowers and an incense stand. Narrow wooden planks called sotoba were placed near gravestones with cherry blossoms tree bent over them.

However, what made Den City Cemetery different from cemeteries in general was the few robots stationed there. There were two types of robots placed there: one was programmed to regularly clean up the gravestones and pick up trash within the vicinity, and another one was programmed to guard the cemetery from graverobbers or suspicious individuals while also regularly reporting to the person in charge of the cemetery. Visitors who come to the cemetery must first report whose grave they wish to visit to one of the robot guards who

then will escort the visitors to the said gravestone and escort them back once they're done paying their respects to the deceased.

In this quiet cemetery, stood a tall young man of a slim to athletic build, placing a bouquet of white chrysanthemum flowers on the grave in front of him before joining his palms together to pray. He has short unkempt black hair that falls over his eyes with white highlights and a pair of lavender-colored eyes. He was wearing an unbuttoned white shirt over a grey short-sleeved T-shirt, black wrist band covering his left wrist, blue jeans, and dark-laced shoes.

"Kento."

The young man, Kento, turned to his left side, his eyes met with a pair of violet eyes of a young woman standing next to him. She has long black hair reaching past her back that she tied in a ponytail. She was wearing a turquoise-colored long jumper dress over a light pink short-sleeved shirt, a silver pendant with diamond-shaped gem, and white high-heeled Mary Jane shoes.

"You came to pick me up, Kazue?" Kento asked her with a soft smile.

"Yes, I do. You're not at your new house when I visited, so I figured you're here." Kazue smiled back, standing next to Kento in front of the gravestones and then prayed together with him.

"I take it you already prayed for your boyfriend as well before praying for my parents?" Kento asked while looking at a gravestone not far from them. Similarly, there was a bouquet of white chrysanthemum in front of the gravestone. The flowers were still fresh, which meant it hadn't been long since the bouquet was placed there. Of course, it wasn't. Because Kento placed that bouquet just a few minutes before he went to his parents' gravestone.

"Obviously. We both know that neither of us would miss praying for him whenever we come here." Kazue replied.

Once they were done praying, Kento and Kazue let the robot escort them out of the cemetery.

"Uncle and Auntie have been looking for you. You just moved to Den City this morning. There is still some furnitures that needs to be put in order back at your new house. Uncle and Auntie need your help to move them here and there. How could you just leave them without saying anything?"

"Sorry. I want to come here as soon as possible, so…" Kento smiled guiltily. He was so eager to come that he forgot about helping his uncle and aunt.

"My father already sent some people to help. By now, they should be done with placing all the furnitures. But that doesn't mean you can slack off with the clean-up." Kazue revealed. After she heard that her childhood friend would be moving to Den City, she arranged with her father to send out some people to help with the moving once Kento and his family arrived at their new house. Her house was only two blocks away from Kento's, so it's not a problem.

"I won't. You know that I'm close to being what people called a clean freak." Kento said. Having lost his parents when he was little and not wanting to trouble his aunt and uncle who took him in, he had learned to become self-sufficient, mainly cleaning, to the point of compulsively cleaning up any messes he could find. But he still understands restraint and won't just clean up someone else's place without getting permission first (unless he deems it necessary).

"Starting tomorrow, you'll attend Den Academy as a freshman. Finally, we can go to the same school." Kazue smiled happily. She had been waiting for this ever since she heard that Kento would move to Den City. Before, they could only meet during weekends or holidays.

"Since you'll be my senior, should I call you 'Kazue-senpai' or 'Hibiki-senpai' at school?" Kento asked jokingly. Kazue is 18, a year older than him. She's already in her third year of high school.

"No need for formalities. Just call me as usual. You wouldn't want me to call you 'Hijiri-kun' at school, don't you?" Kazue prefers for her childhood friend to continue calling her by her name without honorifics. If there are students who object, she'll take care of it.

"You got that right." Kento chuckled, sharing the same sentiment.

Hijiri Residence - Den City

True to Kazue's words, the moment they returned to Kento's house, Kento's uncle and aunt quickly had him help clean up the house, wiping the floors and windows. Kazue offered her help as well, but Kento's aunt kindly declined because she didn't want to trouble her and her family any more than they did, especially after Kazue called people from her house to help them out before Kento arrived. And so, while Kento and his uncle were cleaning, Kazue and Kento's aunt enjoyed themselves with some snacks and tea in the guest room.

After around two hours of cleaning, they were finally done and Kento was allowed to rest in his room with Kazue. Kento was lying with his back on his soft bed while Kazue was sitting on a cushion next to a small desk in his room, opening her laptop.

"Good work, Kento. With this, you won't have to do any housework tomorrow and just focus on your first day at school." Kazue said with her eyes still on her laptop.

"But there's still my side job, isn't it?" Kento retorted, sitting up on his bed as he faced Kazue.

"Yes. Father has already requested your help in programming the prototype of an android that the company and SOL Technology is planning to release." Kazue confirmed, still not facing away from her laptop.

"So now SOL Technologies is interested in the development of androids with Hibiki Enterprise?" Kento guessed.

Hibiki Enterprise. It was an electronics and electrical equipment manufacturing company owned by Kazue's father. The company specialized in robotics and was the one who produced the Roboppi maid robot series. It's the second biggest company after SOL Technologies, and sometimes the two companies formed a collaboration, mostly involving the making of new model of Duel Disks for Duelists. Kazue, being the daughter of the enterprise's owner, has been trained since she was a child to one day take over the company when she was old enough.

"Did you find out by hacking our company or SOL Technologies?" Kazue asked back, eyes finally glancing at Kento.

"No way. I don't need to hack to figure it out since the news made a fuss about SOL Technologies launching a new version of LINK VRAINS after the incident with Knights of Hanoi three months ago. And then not long after that your dad asked me to help him with a new android." Kento chuckled at the accusation.

"Yes. I don't know why SOL Technologies suddenly became interested in building an android. However, since it'll benefit Hibiki Enterprise, my father didn't see a reason to refuse." Kazue explained.

Both Kento and Kazue's confusion was an understatement. Since the company's founding, SOL Technologies' business has always been network or internet related. LINK VRAINS was their biggest success. That's why it's strange that even after developing a new LINK VRAINS, SOL Technologies now also wishes to produce androids through their partnership with Hibiki Enterprise.

"Maybe they're planning to expand their business? That often happens, right?" That was the only reason Kento could think of for the sudden interest in androids.

"Perhaps. Speaking about company, how about you consider working at Hibiki Enterprise once you graduate high school? Your programming skills are already above all the staff working at our company. Even my father acknowledged that." Kazue suggested, eyes twinkling with expectation.

Ever since he was young, Kento had shown interest in programming. To make it even better, he had talent, and just within a year after he started learning, he was already skilled enough to help with making various programs for Kazue's father and many others. People who knew of his skill hailed him as a genius. He and Kazue often made simple robots together, with Kazue mostly doing the mechanics while Kento doing the programming. Despite his interest, however, Kento hasn't felt any interest in working at any company.

"Or are you planning to open your own official agency? You know, like a detective agency specialized in sleuthing cases related to cybercrimes."

As a hacker, Kento accepted two jobs:

First, programming. For this job request, he helped his client to create a specific program that his client couldn't make themselves. He'd be willing to create any program that his client asks for except for viruses or any program that causes harm to others.

Second, sleuthing. For this job request, he serves as a detective and information broker. He'd investigate cybercrimes while also gathering various information within the network that he'd sell to his client if they only want information instead of full investigation.

He won't just accept any client either. Only highly skilled hackers and associates of them could gain access to his chatroom. And he'd make sure to do a background check on each of his clients before accepting requests from them.

"I'll think about my career later. For now, I just want to enjoy my high school life. No need to rush." Kento replied.

Kento understood that now he was in high school, he should start thinking about his career path soon. It's important to think from now on about his future. However, he didn't want to decide so quickly when there were many options out there. He didn't want to rush things only to regret it later.

Kento decided not to think too much and turned on the TV. The channel that he chose showed a news broadcast.

"SOL Technologies issued a statement for the capture of Playmaker, the hero who saved LINK VRAINS three months ago from the cyberterrorist organization, Knights of Hanoi. A bounty has been placed for Playmaker with SOL Technologies promising a big reward for anybody who captures Playmaker." The anchor said as she showed the image of Playmaker, a young man wearing a black and green bodysuit with golden stripes going across his body and a grey belt at the waistline. His hair colors were yellow and red with pink stripes and accents.

Playmaker. No matter where he went, Kento always heard about him these days. Even though three months had passed, Playmaker was still the topic of talk for many people. He was a vigilante who actively opposed the Knights of Hanoi, a group of hackers who had caused a lot of horrid incidents in LINK VRAINS, the Cyberspace where Duelists can take the form of an avatar and take part in Virtual Reality Duels. They were led by a man known as Revolver. Their hacking skills were first-rate, and they never left any traces within the network, making it difficult for authorities to track them down. Many had fallen victims to their atrocity, losing their accounts at their hands.

Three months ago, Playmaker finally succeeded in bringing down the Knights of Hanoi with the help of two Charisma Duelists, Blue Angel and Go Onizuka. Following the fall of Hanoi, Playmaker also disappeared from the network since then, nowhere to be seen.

The news made Kento raise an eyebrow.

"Why is the hero who saved LINK VRAINS being treated like a criminal? Isn't it very ungrateful of SOL Technologies after what he had done?" He wondered. SOL Technologies suffered the biggest impact from Knights of Hanoi's action three months ago, resulting in the closing of the old LINK VRAINS and creation of the new one. If Playmaker hadn't done anything, it could've been worse for them. And yet, they returned his good deed by treating him as a criminal?

"I heard Playmaker has something that originally belonged to SOL Technologies. I don't know the details myself." Kazue herself only knew from what she heard from her father, who himself didn't understand SOL Technologies' fixation with Playmaker.

"Don't tell me that Hibiki Enterprise is also looking for Playmaker." Kento didn't know well about Playmaker, and he was certainly not one of his avid fans, but he wasn't fond of hunting down a guy who had literally risked his life to save the whole network. Some of his acquaintances from Hibiki Enterprise and old classmates from his previous school were turned into Another by Knights of Hanoi, so Kento was grateful to Playmaker, Blue Angel, and Go Onizuka for their part in stopping the culprits.

"No, we don't. That is SOL Technologies' own problem. The partnership between SOL Technologies and Hibiki Enterprise is strictly for the development of the new android." Kazue had asked the same question to her father, and he assured her that Hibiki Enterprise would not interfere in the matters of Playmaker as it has nothing to do with them. Kazue also felt grateful to Playmaker, so knowing Hibiki Enterprise won't help SOL Technologies capturing the Duelist was good news.

Turning back to the news, the anchor now showed the new LINK VRAINS that has been launched. Players were excited with the updated LINK VRAINS, now starting to try out Speed Duel that quickly became popular after the Duel between Playmaker and a Knight of Hanoi. For a safety measure, there was program installed to automatically logged out players when they were in danger.

Watching those players having fun Dueling, Kento's mind wandered to the past when he was still a little boy. He loved playing Duel Monsters with his parents who used to be Duelists themselves. When he was old enough, they went out their way to ask Kazue's father to get him a Duel Disk that he was still using to this day. Back then, he aspired to become a professional Duelist and hoped to create his own cards one day.

But everything changed after that incident 10 years ago.

Kento was so immersed in his reminiscence that he didn't notice Kazue was staring at him with concern.

"Are you… interested in Speed Dueling?" Kazue asked hesitantly. Seeing him staring at the news that showed Speed Duel, her fingers fiddling with one another, showing her unease that Kento was quick to notice.

"No. Not yet. But you don't need to worry too much, Kazue. You know that I'm not as aversive to Dueling as I did before thanks to your boyfriend." Kento smiled gently in response. It wasn't a lie. It took years, but the thought of Dueling didn't scare him as it did before when he was younger. He was still uncomfortable, but he wasn't as scared anymore. And he owed that to Kazue and her boyfriend who were also his best friends, though the latter was no longer here with them.

He reached the remote, intending to change the channel. When he was about to press the button, the screen started to flicker.

"Huh?"

Kento blinked as the screen flickered again and this time showing a silhouette of something humanoid that made Kento drop his remote.

"Kento? What's wrong?" Kazue asked with worry.

Kento gasped and rubbed his eyes with the back of his hand before opening them again to see the TV screen.

It showed the same news about LINK VRAINS. No flickering or any weird silhouette. Kento sighed in relief at that.

" *I guess it was just my imagination."* Kento thought.

Noticing that Kazue still looked worried, Kento decided to change the subject, "I'm thinking of joining a club once I start school. Do you have a club recommendation?" Kento asked.

Looking at Kento's bright expression, Kazue understood that he didn't want her to be bothered by what they talked about earlier. He wasn't wrong. Worrying too much won't help him. Her boyfriend, who was also Kento's best friend, believed that he could eventually overcome his trauma. As Kento's childhood friend, Kazue should also put the same faith in him.

"Tomorrow, I'll show you around the school." Kazue promised.

The two of them began to discuss the android prototype they were working on, unaware that the TV screen behind them briefly flickered, showing the mysterious silhouette a few seconds before it disappeared again.

The Next Day - Den City High School

Though Kazue had already given him a heads up about his new school, the direct experience felt different. Den City High School felt more like a university in Kento's opinion. The classrooms resembled lecture halls and were equipped with an electronic whiteboard that can additionally be connected to a student's Duel Disk, allowing them to access videos of LINK VRAINS. Both teacher and students were also carrying electronic notepads instead of textbooks and pens for writing down lectures.

Now, Kento was standing in front of the whole class with his homeroom teacher next to him for self-introduction.

"It's nice to meet you. My name is Kento Hijiri." Kento bowed politely to his new classmates as he introduced himself.

His new homeroom teacher was in the middle of typing his name when he was introducing himself, but paused when he didn't say anything else after his name.

"You may go on." She said, urging Kento to tell the class more about himself.

"…"

Unfortunately, Kento couldn't say anything else.

Kento has always been an introvert. He's not the type who could stand in front of the whole class being all smiley while introducing himself let alone be the first to strike up a conversation. That doesn't mean he's anti-social though. Otherwise, he would never have become friends with Kazue and her deceased boyfriend and some of his school friends in his previous school. It wasn't easy for him to talk with others unless it was something important or the other person was the one approaching him first.

Once, he did try to emulate some people he deemed a social person, trying to act all energetic and bubbly.

The result?

He failed miserably.

That one try was all that he needed to make him realize he wasn't that person and shouldn't force himself to become someone he's not.

The very least he could do for now was not to be hated by his classmates. Don't make an enemy of anyone in school and stay out of trouble. That was Kento's motto in living a peaceful school life.

Seeing Kento staying quiet, the homeroom teacher decided to continue the introduction in his place. She typed down Kento's full name on the whiteboard before facing her students.

"Hijiri is supposed to be a year older, but when he was little, he must repeat a year due to sickness, so he transferred to this school as a first-year. Everyone, I trust that you all be good to him." She finished the introduction with that and allowed him to take one of the empty seats available.

Kento decided to take a seat next to a boy with fair skin, green eyes, and dark blue hair that spikes outward in the back and contains light blue bangs with pink accents.

"Nice to meet you." Kento greeted him, which the other boy responded with a nod. After that, there was only silence between them as their teacher began her lecture.

While listening to the lecture though, Kento could hear whispers from some students not far from him.

"He looks gloomy."

"He gives off a total otaku vibe."

"This morning, I saw him coming to school with Hibiki-senpai."

"What?! For real?!"

Looks like he didn't give a good first impression to his new classmates. He reads manga and watch anime, but he won't call himself an otaku who'd like to collect figures and stuff. This wasn't a new thing and he had already gotten used to it. As long as nobody bullies or picks a fight with him, that's more than enough for what he considered to be a peaceful school life. Kento tried his best to ignore them and focused on the lesson.

Time passed and it was already the end of school hours. Nothing happened much today except during lunchtime. When Kazue came in to pick him up so she could show him around the school, most of his classmates were staring at them. After they had their lunch and returned to his classroom, his classmates surrounded him. With Kazue's help, he got acquainted with his classmates and memorized all their names at last. Although, they were actually more interested in Kazue than himself. But for his own sake, it's better to know the names of his classmates rather than not at all.

"Hijiri."

Four of his classmates approached him before he could leave the classroom. The four of them were frowning at him, their faces looked like they wanted to punch him. He already had a bad feeling about them even without them making those faces.

"Can I help you?" Kento asked, trying not to sound nervous.

"You sure look chummy with Hibiki-senpai. What kind of relationship the two of you have?" One of the guys asked with a frown.

"Huh?" Kento couldn't understand the question.

"And even on first name basis." One of them added.

Kento couldn't help but wonder why they were being so aggressive toward him when they just met today. Thinking about it, these guys have been glaring at him for a while since lunchbreak when Kazue invited him to have lunch together. He tried to ignore it, but that wouldn't be possible anymore since they confronted him first.

"Are you dating her?" One of them finally asked.

"What? No, we're just childhood friends! Why would you think we're dating?!" Kento raised his hands in denial. Why would they ask that right off the bat? Why does going to school together with Kazue

mean he's dating her? There are a lot of guys and girls going to school together as friends, aren't they?

" *Maybe…"* After wondering, Kento has reached a conclusion and asked in naturally tactless way. "Do you maybe… like Kazue?"

"S… so what? What if we are?!" The four of them made a sound of agreement, their faces blushing red.

Outwardly, Kento was smiling awkwardly at them. Inwardly, he began to scan each of them. If there was one thing that Kento was proud of, he was a good judge of character. He couldn't explain it well, but he could always tell instinctively that someone is a good person, suspicious, or downright awful. These guys were not bad people by nature. The problem was they were one of those people who tend to judge people by their looks. Most guys like them see girls without makeup and are all disappointed.

" *Yeah. They're no good."*

"Too bad, she already has a boyfriend that she loves from a different school." Kento decided to drop the bomb. The reaction he got was as he expected, and he hid a smile of victory behind his fake sympathetic smile.

"HUH?! She has a boyfriend?! Seriously?!"

"But… it makes sense, doesn't it? I mean, how could a pretty and kind girl like her don't have any boyfriend?"

"Right… it should be expected…"

Kento sighed in relief when those guys left with heartbroken crestfallen looks. He did hear that Kazue has admirers in school, but whoever thought that he would be confronted by them on his very first day at school. But thinking twice, perhaps it's better like this. The quicker they gave up on Kazue the better. The guys from before looked like the type who would talk about this to others. It would be

only a matter of time until the news spread about Kazue having a boyfriend to all her admirers in this school. That would keep them away from her to a degree.

Kento purposely left out the most important detail that her supposed boyfriend had already passed away. He didn't tell them for two reasons: One, Kazue is still very much in love with her deceased boyfriend, and two, as her childhood friend and her boyfriend's best friend, he won't let just any guy make a move on her. He won't approve of someone like those guys as her new boyfriend.

"Kento."

Speak of the devil.

Kazue came to his class, her bag in hand. It was about time. Kazue already agreed to show him all the school clubs and then they'll go home together. He was about to get ready when those guys questioned him. Judging from her face, she waited in front of the class and overheard his conversation with her admirers. She didn't say anything, but Kento had already known her for a long time to know that she was thankful to him.

She must've her own share of problems because of her admirers. His spreading the news about her already having a (dead) boyfriend would make things easier for her from now on.

The two of them then left the classroom, ignoring the stares they got.

"We have many clubs here. What kind of clubs you are interested to join?" Kazue asked as they were walking to where most of the club rooms were.

Kento didn't have an idea what club might be good for him. He had considered joining Kazue's robotic club or kendo club since his uncle has been teaching him kendo since he was young, but he also thought of trying out different activities for once apart from his usual routine with Kazue and his uncle.

"Fujiki~ are you going to join the Duel Club or not?"

Kento stopped when he noticed two students that he recognized. Both were from his class. One was chubby with long hair and the other one was the guy who sat next to him during this morning's lecture. He just remembered that he didn't get to ask his name this morning. He doesn't know the name of the chubby guy either.

"Just seeing once and not giving an answer is a mockery to the Duel Club, you know!" The chubby guy told the other guy, Fujiki, who looked indifferent.

"Did the club president say that?" Fujiki asked back calmly.

"N-no… The President said that 'if he is interested, he'll come back again. It's not something I'm going to force on him', so…"

"In other words, you have your own reason why you want a new member right away?"

"I-it can't be helped, we're going to a training camp soon, but there's an odd number of members participating! Zaizen won't be coming because she must help her brother with something! Also, rather than being alone all the time, you should spend your times more with people, it would be fun!"

From their conversation, it seemed that the chubby guy was a member of Duel Club who tried to get Fujiki to join the club to even the numbers of participants.

"Hm? Oh, you're the transfer student! Kento Hijiri, right?!" The chubby guy noticed Kento and Kazue.

"H-hi. Umm… sorry, I haven't gotten your name." Kento replied shyly. He was taken aback that he forgot.

"I'm Shima! Naoki Shima! You better remember it well! Don't be like Fujiki who forgot before!" Shima jabbed at said person who didn't

look particularly annoyed, but his face showed how he wanted to get away from here quickly.

"I'm Yusaku Fujiki. Nice to meet you." Yusaku introduced himself and said nothing further.

"You come here to join the Duel Club, Hijiri? You're wearing Duel Disk, even though it's still an old model like Fujiki's! Are you copying Playmaker?" Shima barraged him with questions all too excitedly. Since Fujiki didn't show an interest in joining, he now shifted his attention to Kento, who was still new to the school.

"Err, no, I'm-"

"Don't just stand there! Come inside, we'll show you how great the Duel Club is! You too Fujiki, come on!"

Before either Kento or Fujiki could decline, Shima had already pushed them inside. Kazue didn't even have the chance to stop him and could only follow them behind. There were four other students inside the club room, three boys and one girl.

Kento recognized the girl. Aoi Zaizen, the younger step-sister of SOL Technologies' security manager, Akira Zaizen. He learned about her during one of his works requested by Kazue's father. And after some digging (hacking) of information, he also learned that she's the real-life identity of the famous Duelist Idol, Blue Angel. Unlike her bubbly persona as Blue Angel, Aoi Zaizen was rather quiet.

" *People can show a different side online that they can't show others in real life…"* Kento thought to himself.

"President! Here, this is Kento Hijiri, he is a new student who just transferred today! He is interested in Duel Club! Even Fujiki also returned!" Shima, again, pushed Kento and Yusaku to the front before they could say anything.

" *More like we're being dragged here…"* Kento inwardly sweat-dropped as he was face-to-face with the Duel Club members who introduced themselves as Sato, Tanaka, Suzuki, and Zaizen.

That was when Kazue finally came out from behind them, revealing herself. Shima was too focused on bringing them in that he forgot about Kazue who was with Kento.

"Hibiki-senpai? You're interested in Duel Club?" Zaizen recognized Kazue who came in.

"Oh, no. I was in the middle of showing Kento around the school when Shima brought him here, so I followed him." Kazue told them.

"Shima-kun, did you bring them here without their consent? I told you that we shouldn't force people to join our club." The club president scolded Shima, who sheepishly trying to come up with excuses. "My name is Hosoda. I'm the president of Duel Club. I apologize on Shima-kun's behalf."

"I-it's okay. Please raise your head! I know Shima-kun doesn't mean anything bad. He loves Duel Monsters and this club, that's why he's so eager to have more members. Right, Shima-kun?" Kento could tell from Shima's eagerness that he loves Duel Monsters. He also went out of his way to invite Fujiki, who looked like the type who didn't talk much based on their exchange, showing he was trying to be friendly. He is not a bad person.

"R-right! And look, Hijiri also has a Duel Disk! That means he Duels, right?!" Shima took that chance to justify his action, pointing at Kento's Duel Disk. It was an older model with a lavender-colored orb outlined by a white circle with a silver side.

"The Duel Disk is also the older model. If you join the Duel Club, you can get the newer model from Zaizen's brother." Shima added, emphasizing his Duel Disk to tempt him into joining.

"Shima." Zaizen called with a soft but stern tone, angry at him for using her connection with her brother to tempt a new member. Again. Kento couldn't blame her for that.

"Sorry, I don't Duel often, actually. I mostly use this Duel Disk for other things." Kento revealed apologetically. Other than the Duel Disk being the last thing his parents gifted to him, he mainly used it for his sleuthing job. Though Duel Disk was mainly used for Dueling, it also has various functions that allowed him to use it for other things that don't involve Dueling. Seeing Shima's disappointed face, he felt a little sorry for crushing his expectation.

"Besides, if Kento wants a new Duel Disk, he can always ask me, his childhood friend. With my connection, Kento can get a new Duel Disk whenever he wants. He simply chooses not to." Kazue intruded. That finally silenced Shima. Everybody in the whole school knew that being the daughter of the CEO of Hibiki Enterprise, all Kazue needed to do was ask her father and he'd immediately get the Duel Disk for her. Shima's last attempt to tempt Kento into joining the club was thus foiled. Or so she thought.

"I guess it won't hurt to listen a bit more about Duel Club." Kento said. While he didn't like Shima's attempts to get him to join, Kento didn't have the heart to flat-out refuse when Shima showed so much enthusiasm.

"Hijiri… ! Thank you!" Shima was touched by Kento's good will.

"Then, Hosoda-san, I can't stay for long, but can you please start your club as usual to give me the general idea what you're usually doing?" Kento requested to the club president. Hosoda and other club members also seems nice. The least he could do was allow them to introduce the Duel Club. Who knows, maybe he'll change his mind and will try out Duel Club despite his reservations. Thinking about it, joining Duel Club might help him with his problem.

"Very well, you may take a seat, Hijiri-kun. You too, Fujiki-kun." Hosoda took them to their respective seats.

Kento was too focused on the Duel Club that he had forgotten about Fujiki who was next to him. His expression remained neutral, but Kento could tell that Fujiki was reluctant to be here. It's clear he has no interest whatsoever in joining the Duel Club. But he still took a seat and listened. He's being considerate.

"Kento, are you sure?" Kazue whispered worriedly as she took a seat next to him.

"I'll just stay for a bit to listen about Duel Club. If I want to join a club, I should know what the club is doing first, right? I will make my decision after I visit all other clubs too." Kento reasoned. Kazue wasn't too convinced but relented.

Hosoda then began explaining the rules of Master Duel and Speed Duel. Even though he never logged into LINK VRAINS, he still followed the update of Dueling rules as part of his 'therapy', so he pretty much aware of the rules of Master Duel and Speed Duel. But he hasn't tried out those rules himself since he rarely Duels, so this explanation will help refresh his mind. Maybe Hosoda chose to go with those explanation because he said he rarely Duels. He appreciated Hosoda for his consideration.

Then the explanation shifted to Monster Card, the main focus of the card game. The president explained how each card was differentiated, which consisted of their names, Type, ATK, DEF, Level, and their Attribute.

"Speaking about Attributes, it is said that there exists the seventh Attribute, the DIVINE-Attribute." Sato suddenly said.

"Oh, I heard about that too. It's an ultra-rare Attribute created by the founder of SOL Technology during the company's early days, right?" Tanaka also remembered.

"Isn't that just a rumor? If it does exist, then there should've been at least one card being disclosed to the public or at the very least another rumor that someone has a DIVINE-Attribute card." Suzuki

said with a scoff, feeling skeptical about its existence. "Since there's no one using DIVINE-Attribute card, it's the same as non-existent."

Listening to them, the so-called DIVINE-Attribute caught Kento's attention. It didn't interest him much, but it didn't sound foreign to him.

" *Right. Unnamed and Ghost Girl did ask if I ever heard about DIVINE-Attribute three months ago."* Kento remembered. But he then dismissed the thought as nothing of importance. Whether cards with that Attribute really exist or not was not his concern.

"That's enough, let's continue the topic at hand." Hosoda interrupted the three of them.

It took around 30 minutes and Hosoda ended his lecture.

"Thank you for taking your time with us. We would be happy if you decided to join. But you don't need to force yourself, Hijiri-kun, Fujiki-kun. There's no point in having a new member if the said member doesn't like being here." The President replied before Shima could say anything, assuring Kento and Fujiki that nobody in the club would take offense if they decided not to join. Instead, he gave him the Duel Club flyer.

Kento was grateful for the President's understanding. With that, they excused themselves from the Duel Club.

"Then, I'll be going head. See you tomorrow, Hijiri." Fujiki also excused himself, going home first. Kento could tell that Fujiki felt relieved that he could finally go home after being stuck in the Duel Club.

"I'm sorry, Kento. I should've spoken earlier before Shima-kun dragged you." Kazue apologized.

"I'm okay. It wasn't unpleasant. I'm just surprised by Shima. Anyway, let's continue our tour. How about we start with clubs you can

recommend for me?" Kento quickly pointed at the other club rooms, distracting Kazue before her guilt consumed her.

He briefly glanced back at the Duel Club, which caused a tightening feeling in his chest.

Kento's Room - Hijiri Residence

"Phew. That's quite eventful." Kento sighed while drying his hair with his towel. He came out from the bathroom, feeling refreshed after taking a nice warm bath.

Aside from what happened during lunch break, his first day at school was as peaceful as he had hoped for. After school, Kento and Kazue returned to their respective homes, but Kento promised to visit her house to help with programming the new android prototype that Hibiki Enterprise is working on.

He looked at the fliers on his desk. Those were fliers given by every club that he visited during his tour with Kazue. Each one of them looked like a pack of hyenas waiting for their prey. He thought only Shima would show such eagerness, but apparently, all the clubs in Den City High School have at least one or two members who'd like to literally drag someone to become a new member of their club.

One of the fliers fell from the desk and he picked it up. It's the Duel Club's flier that the club president gave to him. Seeing the flier as he picked it up, a memory resurfaced in his mind.

" *You lose!"*

The memory just came in a flash.

The notification of his failure. Then came the electric shock that electrocuted his entire body. Everything hurt. Every damn thing. He winced across the floor. He lies so still, breathing shallowly. His vision darkened for minutes. His brain stuttered for a moment and

his eyes took in more light than he expected, every part of him went on pause while his thoughts were trying to catch up.

" *If I die… this pain will end…"*

Kento covered his left wrist with his right hand. Closing his eyes, trying to shake away the memory, the sinister urge, that he had been trying to forget for the past ten years. He turned to the wristband he was wearing, eyes focusing on the wristband until a different memory resurfacing in place of the nightmare.

" *You used to like Dueling but now not anymore?"*

There he was. His best friend, who had extended a helping hand to him.

" *But you're still wearing your Duel Disk everywhere. That means you really don't want to hate it, don't you? Because it holds your memories with your parents."*

That's right. His parents were Duelists in their youth, so when he showed interest in Duel Monsters, his parents taught him how to Duel and gifted him a Duel Disk. Those times learning how to Duel with his parents was one of the happiest memories in his life, one he wished to treasure forever. But then that incident happened 10 years ago, causing him to fear the mere thought of Dueling and consequently ruined one of his most cherished memories with his late parents.

He didn't want that. He didn't want the memory of the joy that he shared with his parents, the thing that connected him with his parents, to forever be tainted by those hellish days he suffered.

" *Let's do it step by step. It'll take time, but I'm sure you can enjoy Dueling again like you used to. Don't worry, I'll help you out! Let's try enjoying Dueling together!"*

Kento's breathing became steady. His heart rate was slowing down. His fearful gaze subsided into sorrow the more he stared at the wristband.

"Just when I believed I'm going to start enjoying Dueling again… you left this world…" Kento murmured as he remembered his deceased best friend. He then gasped as he realized he was close to returning to his bad habit again. "No! Don't be so pessimistic! I can do this. He and Kazue already helped me so much. I can't let our efforts becoming in vain."

Kento picked a white T-shirt with a blue stripe pattern on the center to wear, now ready to go to Kazue's house. He wore his Duel Disk and then departed, having already told his uncle and aunt beforehand. His uncle was still at work and his aunt had an appointment to meet with her friend. They wouldn't be home until late at night, so the house was empty.

"Hello, Big Bro!"

When Kento opened the door to head out, a young fair-skinned boy with messy gray hair and olive-colored eyes wearing a green T-shirt and green short pants greeted him cheerfully. Kento recognized him as Minoru Hibiki, Kazue's younger brother who is still in his first-year elementary school.

"Minoru-kun!" Kento the boy by his waist and then with a grunt, lifted the grinning boy up over his shoulder for a while before putting him down again.

"You came to pick me up? Thank you. Good boy." Kento affectionately ruffled the boy's head, making the boy smile proudly.

"Now that Big Bro lives here, we can play together every day!" Minoru said so happily.

Kento had been helping Kazue take care of her little brother since he was born. Whenever he came to visit and their parents were away,

he'd babysit Minoru together with Kazue. Often being taken care of by Kento, in Minoru's eyes, Kento was technically his older brother. Before he moved, every Saturday and Sunday, Minoru would always wait for Kento to come to his house so they could play. Kento also considered Minoru like his younger brother.

"Come on! Let's go! Big Sis is already waiting for you!" Minoru eagerly pulled Kento's hand, wanting him to go to his house immediately. Kento just let the boy pull him until they noticed something in front of the fence of his house.

"Hm? What's this?" Minoru pointed at a cardboard box.

There was a cardboard box placed in front of the fence just beneath the mailbox. Kento picked up the box. There was nothing written but a note that said 'For Kento Hijiri'. He carefully opened the box. Inside was a small, toy sized robot. It's similar to the Roboppi robot series, but its body was mostly bright pink with emerald wheels and cobalt spheres. It has a white neck and stomach with mitten shaped cyan hands. On top of the robot was a USB.

"Who sent this?" Kento tried to look for anything that could tell him who the sender was, but there was nothing. Looking at the USB, perhaps he'll find out who the sender was if he checks what's inside the USB.

Holding the box with him, Kento rushed out to Kazue's house with Minoru in tow.

Kazue's Room - Hibiki Residence

Arriving at Kazue's house, Minoru wanted to play with his 'big bro' in his room, but Kazue reminded him that Kento came to their house to help with their father's work. That left Minoru dejected and pouting.

"Minoru, once I'm done with my work, I'll play with you. Let's play the new game that you said you bought yesterday. Just the two of us.

Okay?" Kento gently told the pouting boy.

"Promise? Just the two of us?" Minoru raised his pinky finger while asking which Kento took with his own pinky.

"Yes. Pinky swear." Kento promised.

And that was enough to convince Minoru to wait patiently in his room.

Now, Kento was sitting face-to-face with Kazue in her room. She was inspecting the robot that Kento brought. The work that her father had requested to get help was put aside for a moment. Checking the robot, save for the colors, it was no different from the other models Hibiki Enterprise had manufactured. This type, however, was more specialized in gardening than house cleaning.

"I don't find anything suspicious from this robot. It has exactly the same function as the company has been producing." Kazue told Kento after she finished dissembling and then reassembling the robot.

"That leaves this USB then." Kento looked at the USB he was holding. He thought he should check the robot just in case before checking the USB. Fortunately, it doesn't seem that the robot has anything that can cause harm to them.

Kento inserted the USB into Kazue's computer. Just like when he opened the box, what was inside the USB was something that Kento didn't expect.

A nameless online avatar.

The avatar is in a form of a young man with white eyelashes and white hair reaching below his shoulder partially pulled back in a braided half ponytail with a swirl on top resembling a halo. The bangs were silver colored with lavender-colored lines. The avatar wears a silver jumpsuit, lavender panels down the front and sides

underneath the arms, and a leading the back to hang loosely from the hem of the coat. The avatar wears a silver trench coat lined with white lines patterning both the inside and the outside of the coat with two wing shaped patterns on both sides of the coat. He also wears white and grey fingerless gloves.

Aside from the avatar, there was also another file containing a website address.

Typing the address, it showed a gate.

"A gate? Does the sender is trying to tell you to go to this site using the avatar?" Kazue wondered skeptically.

Looking at the gate, Kento felt a strange sensation, like something was tingling on his head. There was something - someone on the other side of the gate.

"I'll try to connect the LINK VRAINS system to enter it." Kento said, surprising Kazue.

"Wait, you're going? We don't know what's behind that gate. What if whoever sent this is trying to lure you into something dangerous?" Kazue objected. Kento's hacker alterego is quite well-known among the hacker community. There were various people who had lured Kento into a trap before. Their reasons ranging from personal grudge, to force him to work for them, etc.

"But it's not like we have other options. Maybe whoever sent this to me is waiting on that website. I'll go with this avatar for now. If I don't return for a long time, I trust you to help me." Kento picked up his Duel Disk. Though before he had no interest logging into LINK VRAINS, he still set the Duel Disk to LINK VRAINS system in case he ever decided to try logging in. He didn't insert any card though.

"I… I could feel it. There's something behind that gate. I'm sure of it…" Kento added.

Kazue understood what he was referring to. He sensed a presence in the network. It was a secret between them that nobody else knew. Ever since the incident ten years ago, Kento was able to sense a presence within the network. He could feel it even when he was offline. Kento never told anyone about this because he knew how crazy it sounds. Kazue was the only one whom he confided in about this secret. Even then, it took a few times until he proved to her that this ability was real.

"No. I'm coming too. It's better for both of us to go. If it turns out to be dangerous, for safety measure, I've installed a program that would automatically log us out in our Duel Disk." Kazue insisted, already wearing her Duel Disk. Unlike Kento's, it's the newest model made by herself for her family's company. Even though her programming skill is lesser compared to Kento's she could still do at least this much.

Kento knew there was no point trying to convince her to stay. Once she made up her mind, convincing her otherwise was next to impossible.

"Before we go, we should give this avatar a name." Kazue suggested.

"Name… Do you have any idea? When it comes to giving name, you're better than I do." Kento asked.

Kazue stared at the avatar and then back to Kento and then to the avatar again. After a few minutes of thinking, Kazue typed the name:

Holysaber.

"It's an English name combining your last name and first name. You're also training in kendo with your uncle three times a week, right? I believe it fits you." Kazue looked proud at the name she came up with.

"Holysaber… Yeah, that doesn't sound bad." Kento accepted the name. He could always trust Kazue with her naming sense.

With that decided, Kento and Kazue then sat on armchairs, making sure they were in comfortable position before finally uttering,

"Into the VRAINS!"

Streams of blue data surrounded their bodies, sending their consciousness into the network.

Unknown Site - Network

Opening his eyes, he found himself in what appears to be a desolate land.

He looked at his own body. Though he couldn't see his own face, from the clothes he was wearing, he's now in the form of his avatar, Holysaber.

"How do you feel with your new avatar?"

Turning behind him, stood an Egyptian young woman with sort black hair and brown eyes wearing a cream-colored sleeveless one-piece dress with golden-colored leather covering the chest and the bottom similar to a sarong. Gold armor covered her collarbone with red data-like patterns on the armor. Underneath the dress was a gold-colored legging covering her legs. She also wears a pair of gold armor covering her arms.

"Kazue?! It's you?!" Holysaber exclaimed in shock.

"I'm going by the name Ryuki online, so please call me Ryuki. I'll also call you Holysaber while we're online." Ryuki chuckled in amusement at Holysaber's reaction.

"Ryuki? No offense, but the name doesn't sound matching with your avatar design." When hearing the name Ryuki, Holysaber's image was that of a Japanese woman wearing a kimono or yukata or Japanese armor.

"That's exactly why. Having a mismatching name and avatar would make it harder for people to figure out my offline identity. Don't you think so?" Ryuki explained her reason.

"You're not wrong there." Holysaber couldn't deny that.

"Anyway, where are we now?" Holysaber looked around them.

They had arrived at the site, but the place they were in looked like a city that had been wrecked down in a war. There was nothing but debris and rubble of destroyed buildings and even some big holes like meteorites have fallen there.

"What is this place? What happened here?" Ryuki looked at their surroundings worriedly.

Holysaber and Ryuki decided to walk further, hoping to find someone or something that could give them a clue about the one who told them to come here. However, until they reached what looked like a destroyed tower, they still couldn't find anything noteworthy. But Holysaber doubted it was just a prank. The sender went as far as providing him with a high-quality avatar, there was no way he told him to go to this place for nothing.

Also, Holysaber didn't understand why, but since he arrived here, his chest hurt so much. It was strange. This was the first time he ever stepped foot here. This was even the very first time he ever logged into the network. Yes, it was an unpleasant sight, but why does it hurt so much like he was the one being hurt?

The sound of falling rock alerted them to go to a defensive stance, looking in alert at the direction of the sound.

"Who's there?!" Holysaber shouted.

From behind one of the rubbles, a small creature came out. A creature with white fur, green hands and feet, a pair of purple eyes, and a golden halo above its head.

"Kuri!"

Upon seeing Holysaber, the creature flew and latched itself to Holysaber's chest. In his surprise, Holysaber looked at the creature's feature and recognized a certain Duel Monster with similar feature.

"A… Kuriboh…?" Holysaber said uncertainly. It looked like a Kuriboh, but he had never seen this type of Kuriboh before.

"Kuri!" The Kuriboh nestled itself on Holysaber's shoulder, tickling him with its soft fur.

"My, so cute!" Ryuki commented, immediately charmed by the monster's cuteness. "It seems to like you."

Admittedly, Holysaber also found this Kuriboh latching on to him was so sweet, but he was also confused why would this Kuriboh took an instant liking to him when they've just met. Looks like the lesson of 'never talk to a stranger' doesn't apply to Duel Monsters. Or maybe its instinct could tell they were harmless?

"Hey! Saint Kuriboh! Where are you going?!"

"Rikuriku!"

Following behind the Kuriboh, two more small creatures came out. One was a humanoid creature and one looked like another Duel Monster that seemed to be another type of Kuriboh.

"Who are you two?! Are you guys the ones who destroyed my homeland?! Get away from Saint Kuriboh!" The humanoid creature threw an accusing finger at them.

"W-what?!" Holysaber was taken aback by the sudden accusation.

Hearing the humanoid creature raise his voice, the Kuriboh latching on Holysaber, Saint Kuriboh, let go and spread its hands while facing the two creatures.

"Kuri! Kuri!"

Saint Kuriboh made a gesture that in human terms, appeared to be shaking head, meaning it was trying to tell the other two creatures that Holysaber and Ryuki were not the ones responsible and meant no harm. The AI, though unable to understand what Saint Kuriboh was saying, seemed to at least understand what it was trying to convey to him.

"Not them? But then who are they? Why are they here? Nobody except the Ignis supposed to know this place!"

Ryuki stepped in, taking a step closer to the two creatures who were glaring and took a defensive stance.

"We came here after receiving a message containing an address to this site. We just arrived here and looking for the person who sent the message to us." Ryuki kindly explained to them. Her posture was relaxed, she raised her hands to show she meant no harm.

"Ryuki, what are you doing? Are you sure it's okay to let your guard down like that?" Holysaber asked in a whisper. They appeared harmless, but he had long learned not to judge by appearance alone. Ryuki only nodded before turning to them again.

"I've seen you before. You're the A.I. that was with Playmaker, right?" Ryuki kneeled them so she at least didn't appear too tall for them.

"Huh? A.I. that was with Playmaker?" Holysaber blinked. He only ever saw Playmaker on the pics shown in the news. None of the pics shown included this small creature. She said this creature is an A.I.,

but the way he moved and spoke didn't look like an A.I. at all. He looked so… alive.

"Oh! Finally! There's someone who recognized me as Playmaker's partner! Ai-chan is so happy!" The A.I. cried tears of joy, making Holysaber even more astonished.

" *Is he really an A.I.?"* Holysaber couldn't help but be skeptical. But that's not what is important right now. "Looks like you're not the one who sent the message to us. Can you tell us what happened here then?"

A.I. or not, these two were the only ones they found after arriving here. Perhaps knowing more about this place from them will give some clues about the person who sent the package to him.

"Before you're asking someone a question, shouldn't you introduce yourself first?" The A.I. demanded. He was still suspicious.

That… surprisingly made sense. He said this place is his homeland (albeit already reduced to mere rubble), so technically he's the host. As outsiders who came without permission, it's a common courtesy for Holysaber and Ryuki to introduce themselves first. Holysaber also didn't sense any malicious intention from this A.I., only wariness. Self-introduction won't harm anybody. Not like they're going to reveal their real-life identities.

"I'm Holysaber and she's Ryuki. We are-"

Click

Holysaber paused when he heard the sound. Looking behind him and above, he saw someone.

A man cladded in basil green overcoat with shamrock green cauldrons and numerous ornamental belts and straps. The lining of his coat is silver, and he also wears black gloves, black pants and boots that match his jacket. His right arm was prosthetic. His head

was completely covered by the hoodie and a mask in resemblance of Melpomene mask from Greece. He was riding a D-Board, also matching his outfit.

The guy pointed his prosthetic arm down, revealing a gun barrel. Seeing the light from the barrel, Holysaber knew what was coming.

"Everyone, get down!" Holysaber pushed down Ryuki, the A.I., and the round monster, evading the gunshot right on time before it could hit them.

"What?! Who is that guy?! Why is he attacking us?!" The A.I. looked at their assailant in panic.

"We can ask about that later, now he must run! Run!"

Holysaber ushered them to run. Nobody objected when a guy was attacking right behind them. They took cover in one of the rubbles, but Holysaber knew it would only be a matter of time until their attacker shot down all the rubble and found them.

" *His arrival is too much for a coincidence. The one who sent that package was most likely that guy."* When Holysaber noticed him, he immediately pointed his gun at them. He made that shot without targeting anybody specifically, meaning that any of them got shot was good for him.

" *Since he knew about this place and that A.I. said someone destroyed his home, it's also possible that he was the one responsible. But why did he send this site's coordinate to me?"* Holysaber wondered if this has something to do with the painful feeling that he felt when he arrived here.

Only one way to find out.

"I'll distract him, you guys run away."

Holysaber told Ryuki and the others and quickly ran out from their hiding place before receiving any objection. He ignored Ryuki's call, focusing on running as fast as he could and away from them. As he had hoped, the masked assailant followed him. What was surprising, however, was that he jumped out from his D-Board and ran on foot chasing him.

" *What? It would've been easier for him to chase me with his D-Board. Is he making fun of me? Or… I'm the one he's targeting?"*

Holysaber entered a destroyed building that appeared to be similar to a Greek temple. Despite its state, Holysaber felt a bit more comfortable just by entering this place. He would like to savor that comfort if not for a crazy guy trying to kill him right behind. And to make things worse, he reached a dead end with no way to escape. The attacker was slowly closing in.

"Kuri!"

"Huh?" Holysaber blinked when he heard the voice. He turned to his side and was surprised to see that Saint Kuriboh was there. "Y-you're following me?! It's dangerous! Go away!"

"Kurikuri!" Holysaber didn't need to ask for a translation to know that the Kuriboh refused to leave.

Right when Holysaber was ready to try to convince it again, Saint Kuriboh reached the halo above its head. Its other hand then took Holysaber's arm that was wearing the Duel Disk and placed the halo above it.

"Kuri!"

As if it was a cue, the halo started shining brightly, creating a pillar of light that reached the sky above. Outside, Ryuki and the others could see the pillar of light.

"What's that light?!" Ryuki looked at the light coming out from the ruins where Holysaber went to.

"That light… could it be… !" The AI seemed to recognize the light. He flew to the ruins in a hurry, ignoring Ryuki and Linkuriboh behind him.

Engulfed within the bright warm light, flashes of scenes came into his mind. Each didn't linger long, but he could see the A.I. from before and other A.I.s the same as him. How this world used to be before it was destroyed. It was almost overwhelming him until he saw a vision of someone.

A strangely familiar A.I.

This A.I. was like the one he met earlier, but this one has an oval-shaped head with six strands pointing down in resemblance of hair and boot-like legs. He has markings in the shape of thin lines and a wing-shaped marking on his chest over his silver-tinted white body. His eyes were diamond-shaped and arctic blue in color.

The A.I. was staring at him.

"Rise up, *****."

Right when Holysaber heard the A.I.'s words to him, the light dissipated. He was back at the destroyed temple with Saint Kuriboh and the mysterious attacker. The A.I. was nowhere to be seen. He looked at his Duel Disk and was shocked to find the supposed empty Duel Disk now had been inserted fully with cards.

"A deck?" Holysaber blinked. He looked at Saint Kuriboh. "You're giving this to me?"

"Kuri!" Saint Kuriboh confirmed.

At the sight of the deck, the mysterious attacker raised his own Duel Disk. Holysaber didn't recognize the design the same as the ones

sold in the market, so it must have been personally made. But based on how there wasn't any card like his Duel Disk, it must be based on the newest model that has its cards completely digitized.

"Duel." The attacker finally spoke and activated his Duel Disk.

Holysaber gritted his teeth. He hated it, but he was not given a choice in the matter. It's either he Duel or he's screwed. The thought of Dueling still didn't sit well with him, but any reservations he had were pushed aside because of the direness of the situation and he wasn't the only one in danger.

" *I must protect Ryuki and the others!"*

Holysaber finally activated his Duel Disk as well.

"Duel!"

Holysaber LP: 4000

Unknown LP: 4000

Holysaber drew until he had five cards in his hand. Looking at the cards, he was surprised for two different reasons.

First, all Monster Cards he drew were DIVINE-Attribute. It's the rumored seventh Attribute that he heard so many times since he began his job as a hacker. The seventh Attribute that was supposedly non-existent. Now, he's holding more than one DIVINE-Attribute card in his hand. It was surreal.

" *No way. DIVINE-Attribute does exist…"* Holysaber felt like pinching himself to make sure this wasn't a dream.

Second and the strangest of all, he knew these cards. Even without having to read the cards' description, he somehow knew what these cards were for, like the back of his hand. Their ATKs, their effects, and all others.

" *Is this having something to do with those visions I had?"* That was the only answer Holysaber could reach. Ever since he had those visions, he somehow knew some things that he had no prior knowledge of.

"I'm taking the first turn." The unknown attacker declared.

"From my hand, I summon Mecha Phantom Beast Tetherwolf." The attacker summoned a black-colored Boeing AH-64 Apache type helicopter shaped monster with the head of a wolf in Attack Position in the Main Monster Zone.

Mecha Phantom Beast Tetherwolf (MACHINE/WIND/ATK: 1700/DEF: 1200/LV: 4)

The general data about the summoned monster appeared on both players' Duel Disk screens. Following the set programming for Duel, both players cannot see the effects of cards controlled by their opponents until the said opponent declares all the card effects or if they take control of the opponent's cards. This was done to ensure fairness for both Duelists and brings more unpredictability to the Duel.

"If this card is Normal Summoned from my hand, I can Special Summon 1 Mecha Phantom Beast Token." The attacker summoned a small, white-colored plane-shaped monster in Defense Position next to Tetherwolf.

Mecha Phantom Beast Token (MACHINE/WIND/ATK: 0 / DEF: 0 /LV: 3)

"Tetherwolf's Level increased by the total Levels of all Mecha Phantom Beast Monster Token I control." The attacker revealed, increasing Tetherwolf's Level from 4 to 7.

"I set a card and end my Turn." The attacker concluded.

Holysaber touched the card on top of his Deck. After that incident 10 years ago, he stopped Dueling. When he started again after being coaxed by his best friend, he had only done it the traditional way, using hand-drawn paper as a makeshift field, without having to use his Duel Disk. This was the first time he's Dueling like this. The feeling was almost like when he was forced to Duel using the VR inducer back then. The thought broke a cold sweat from him.

" *Calm down. I'm not in that place anymore."*

Holysaber tried his upmost best to push aside the negative thoughts he had in his mind. He mustn't get distracted now. He can do this. Knowing the Deck he's using is convenient for him. He must win this Duel. Not only for his own sake, but also for Ryuki's sake.

Just as Holysaber thought of this, from the direction of the entrance they came from, Ryuki, Dark Ignis, and Linkuriboh arrived.

"Holysaber!" Ryuki called out, her voice filled with concern.

The three of them looked at what had transpired in front of them. Their mysterious assailant was raising his Duel Disk and had two monsters on his Field. Across him, Holysaber was holding a Duel Disk as well and unlike before that was empty, it has a full Deck stacked. They were in the middle of a Duel.

"Holysaber, are you okay…?" Ryuki asked her childhood friend. She had the right to be worried. After all, Holysaber had always been reluctant when it comes to Duel-related things, especially the virtual one. Just seeing VR equipment was enough to make him frozen stiff. But here he was, facing someone in a Duel.

"I guess?" Holysaber himself wasn't sure if he's really okay. Even he himself was surprised that he was still standing, Dueling against someone. He did focus on pushing his negative thoughts aside, but he never thought it'd work when it didn't before. The only explanation he could think of was his survival instinct took over in a moment of desperation.

"Stand back, I'll deal with him!" Holysaber told them before facing his opponent again.

"My Turn! Draw!" Holysaber looked at the card. Just a glance at the picture of the card without reading the effect, he immediately knew what kind of effect it had.

"I summon Olympios Stratos - Akolouthos!" Holysaber summoned a monster in the form of a humanoid young child with green eyes and short blonde hair. It was wearing a white cloak, long black socks, white shoes, and a black belt with a holster filled with papers.

Olympios Stratos - Akolouthos (CYBERSE/DIVINE/ATK: 300 / DEF: 1000 / LV: 3)

"That's Divine Ignis' monster! You're using his deck?!" Dark Ignis pointed at Akolouthos with astonishment.

"Saint Kuriboh gave me the deck." Holysaber told him immediately. He didn't want to be accused of stealing it.

"It's DIVINE-Attribute… ! It does exist?! It's not just a rumor?!" Ryuki exclaimed, equally as shocked as Holysaber when he saw his cards.

"Hehehe! Yeah, it exists! But only my best bud can make those cards!" Dark Ignis said with pride. But then he stared at Holysaber. Questions in his mind. *"Saint Kuriboh not only being very attached with that guy but even went as far as giving him Divine Ignis' deck. Who is he?"*

Saint Kuriboh had always been timid to everyone but Divine Ignis, him, and Linkuriboh. Even for him and Linkuriboh, it took months to finally get Saint Kuriboh to open up to them. And yet this guy succeeded in winning over Saint Kuriboh in their first meeting and Saint Kuriboh even allowed him to use his master's deck. Usually, Saint Kuriboh would've gone all savage if anybody dared to carelessly touch his master's deck without permission. Perhaps

watching him Duel would help him see what Saint Kuriboh saw in him.

"When I don't have any cards on my Spell or Trap Zone, I can Special Summon Olympios Stratos - Archon from my hand!" Holysaber Special Summoned a monster in the form of a humanoid young adult with premium-blond hair and blue eyes. It was wearing a white cape with blue as an inverted color, white and golden top, black shoes, and black pants.

Olympios Stratos - Archon (CYBERSE/DIVINE/ATK: 200/DEF: 500/LV: 2)

"When I control two or more Olympios Stratos monsters on my Field, I can Special Summon Olympios Stratos - Kalogeros from my hand!" Holysaber Special Summoned another monster, this time in the form of a humanoid adult wearing a long beige coat, black pants, and a large silver-ornamented hat. He was holding an orb decorated with silver bird-shaped ornament.

Olympios Stratos - Kalogeros (CYBERSE/DIVINE/ATK: 1500/DEF: 1000/LV: 5)

"I activate Akolouthos' effect! I can Release this card and add its DEF value to the ATK of another Olympios Stratos monster I control!" Holysaber Released Akolouthos, adding its DEF to Kalogeros, increasing the latter's ATK.

Olympios Stratos - Kalogeros ATK: 1500 = 2500

"Since an Olympios Stratos monster's original ATK or DEF is changed, I can activate Archon's effect! The Olympios Stratos monster whose ATK or DEF is changed can attack twice, but at the end of the Turn, Archon will be sent to the Graveyard!" Holysaber declared. Following his declaration, Archon raised his bronze staff, showering Kalogeros with a bluish light, granting Kalogeros the opportunity to attack twice.

"Battle! I attack Mecha Phantom Beast Tetherwolf with Kalogeros!" Holysaber declared his Battle Phase.

Kalogeros raised his orb. The orb began to shine, forming smaller light orbs that spinning rapidly behind him as he conjured a concentrated crystal surrounded by firefly-shaped flames and fired it at the Mecha Phantom Beast monster. The crystal shattered into six pieces, with three pieces hurling towards the opposing monster.

"When I control a Mecha Phantom Beast Token, Tetherwolf cannot be destroyed by battle or card effects." The attacker revealed.

"But you still take damage!" Holysaber reminded.

Three crystal shards pierced Tetherwolf's body, causing it to crash down. The unknown attacker got pushed back from the blow of the fall.

Unknown LP: 4000 = 3200

"Once again, I attack Tetherwolf!" Holysaber declared his second attack.

Kalogeros' remaining crystal shards hurled forward, once again piercing the Mecha Phantom Beast monster.

Unknown LP: 3200 = 2400

"I set a card and end my Turn." Since Holysaber finished his Turn, Archon was sent to the Graveyard, but its effect still applies to Kalogeros.

"Wow. Not bad! Go, kick his butt, Holysaber!" Dark Ignis cheered, which was mimicked by Linkuriboh next to him.

Ryuki, however, didn't share the same optimism. Everything was so sudden that she couldn't help but keep worrying for Holysaber, hoping he wouldn't suffer any panic attack soon. Holysaber might be able to stand right now because they were in danger, but hysterical

strength in the moment of desperation was not something that can last long. And not counting the fact his opponent was trying to off them, Ryuki sensed that there was more danger to him than he lets on. He's not someone to be underestimated.

" *Kento… please, get through this…"* Ryuki prayed in her heart.

"My Turn. I summon Mecha Phantom Beast Sabre Hawk." The attacker summoned a grey-colored monster in the shape of Northrop Grumman RQ-4 Global Hawk with the head of saber-toothed cat in Attack Position in the Main Monster Zone.

Mecha Phantom Beast Sabre Hawk (MACHINE/TUNER/WIND/ATK: 2100/DEF: 100/LV: 4)

"Sabre Hawk's Level is increased by the total Levels of all Mecha Phantom Beast Token I control." Like he did with Tetherwolf, he increased the Level of Sabre Hawk from 4 to 7.

"Two Level 7 monsters… Is he planning to… !" Ryuki gasped as she realized what the unknown attacker's next move would be.

"I Overlay Tetherwolf and Sabre Hawk." The attacker held out both his arms with their palms flat and facing downward and then placed his right hand over his left as the Overlay Network appeared underneath the Xyz Materials. Tetherwolf and Sabre Hawk became bits of data and entered nodes on the Overlay Network, which was similar to the Arrowhead portal when performing a Link Summon. Once they were set, energy flowed in four beams past the unknown attacker creating a portal in front of him.

"Xyz Summon. Appear, Rank 7, Mecha Phantom Beast Dracossack." He summoned a white-colored monster in the shape of Antonov An-225 Mriya plane with dragon head to his Extra Monster Zone in Attack Position.

Mecha Phantom Beast Dracossack (MACHINE/XYZ/WIND/ATK: 2400/DEF: 1200/RNK: 7/ORU: 2)

"An Xyz Monster?!" Dark Ignis exclaimed in shock.

"I activate Mecha Phantom Beast Dracossack's effect. Once per Turn, by detaching an Overlay Unit, I can Special Summon 2 Mecha Phantom Beast Tokens." The attacker detached one of two Overlay Units, Special Summoning two Tokens to his Field.

"I activate Magic Card: Air Force Gear. If I control two or more Machine Type Tokens on the Field, I can Special Summon 1 Level 4 or lower Mecha Phantom Beast from my Deck." The attacker Special Summoned a monster in the form of yellow-colored Harrier jump jet with the head of a leopard.

Mecha Phantom Beast Harrliard (MACHINE/WIND/ATK: 1800/DEF: 800/LV: 4)

"While I control Tokens, Dracossack and Harrliard cannot be destroyed by battle or card effects." The attacker revealed.

" *I see, all Mecha Phantom Beast monsters share that same effect…"* Holysaber frowned. This would make it difficult for him in the next turn unless he destroys those Tokens first.

"I activate Harrliard's effect. I Release 1 Token to Special Summon 1 Mecha Phantom Beast Monster from my hand." The attacker Released one of his two Tokens and summoned a monster in the form of black Northrop Grumman B-2 Spirit aircraft in the shape of batoidea fish.

Mecha Phantom Beast Raystailth (MACHINE/WIND/ATK: 100/DEF: 2100/LV: 3)

"I activate Mecha Phantom Beast Dracossack's additional effect. By Releasing 1 Mecha Phantom Beast Monster, I can target 1 card on the Field and destroy it, but it cannot attack this Turn." The attacker Released Harrliard, allowing Dracossack to extend its dragon head and devoured Holysaber's Kalogeros.

"Ah! He destroyed the strongest monster on Holysaber's Field! Now he's wide open!" Dark Ignis shouted in dismay as Holysaber's Monster Zones were both empty.

"Battle. I attack directly with Raystailth." The attacker declared his Battle Phase. Raystailth flew up above Holysaber.

"I activate Air Force Gear's additional effect. I can banish this card and a Machine Type monster in my Graveyard to switch the ATK of a Machine Type monster I control with another monster on either player's Field until the end of this Turn." The attacker banished Air Force Gear and Tetherwolf from his Graveyard, switching Raystailth's ATK with Dracossack's ATK.

Mecha Phantom Beast Raystailth ATK: 100 = 2400

"I activate Trap Card: Hymn of Sleep! When my opponent declared Battle Phase while I have a face-up DIVINE element monsters in my Graveyard, I can change that monster's position to Defense Position!" Holysaber opened his Reverse Card, the only card he had left on his Field. Unfortunately, his opponent had already anticipated that.

"I activate Raystailth's effect. I can Release 1 token to destroy 1 Magic or Trap card on the Field." The attacker Released the remaining Token to destroy Holysaber's Trap.

Raystailth sent out a small bomb that quickly destroyed the Trap Card before it could take effect. With Holysaber's Trap being destroyed, Raystailth continued its attack. It opened fire, sending out a bigger black bomb that exploded right above Holysaber, sending him flying back.

Holysaber LP: 4000 = 1600

"I activate Quick-Play Spell: Aerial Blow. When a WIND Attribute Monster I control inflicts battle damage to opponent, that opponent will be inflicted additional damage equal to half of a WIND Attribute

monster I control." The attacker wasn't finished, activating another card from his hand right after the attack.

From the card, a strong gust of wind came out and blew away Holysaber until he hit the wall behind him.

Holysaber LP: 1600 = 400

"When Raystailth inflicts battle damage to my opponent, I can Special Summon 1 Token to my Field." The attacker added, summoning a new Token in Defense Position.

"I set a card and end my Turn." He finished. Raystailth's ATK then reverted to normal.

Mecha Phantom Beast Raystailth ATK: 2400 = 100

"You gotta be kiddin' me… That guy destroyed all the cards on Holysaber's Field just like that!" Dark Ignis held his head in panic. The situation didn't look good for Holysaber.

" *He used Dracossack's effect to destroy Holysaber's only monster and then summoned Raystailth because he anticipated Holysaber's Trap while also using it to attack so he could summon a Token after he used up the other Tokens he had. To think he calculated that far…"* Ryuki was right not to underestimate Holysaber's opponent.

Holysaber winced in pain from the attack. This was online, so it didn't physically damage his real body, but the pain he felt was very real. He sluggishly back on his feet, one hand on the wall to hold himself up until he faces the Field again. However, he then realized how much he was trembling. This wasn't a new reaction. He had experienced many times, so many that he lost count.

Seeing the Field, a realization dawned on him. He didn't have any monster on his Field. The cards in his hand won't be enough to get him out of this situation. He had lost so many LP.

" *Am I… going to lose…?"*

It was like a switch inside him was being pressed.

Then, his world turned upside-down in a second.

It felt as if his lungs weren't there as he tried to bring air in. He could feel his muscles straining and the thoughts in his head turn from fear to dizzy confusion. Already his thoughts were becoming jumbled, like he was in a nightmare. All his eyes could see were no longer the temple or the opponent in front of him, but two words that popped out the moment his LP was reduced to nothing.

" *You lose!"*

Holysaber could hear the air moving through his bronchioles like they were some kind of weird instrument. Already he felt as if concrete had been poured into his airways. The panic and lack of air drove him to start gasping, breathing as if the oxygen had been sucked from the air around him. Holysaber doubled over and then fell to his knees, one hand on the ground to support his weight.

It hurts…

His mind reverted to that of a child again. A child lying down in a white room. He could barely move a finger. Every muscle has seized up. His body was struggling to recover, to repair the damage. The usefulness of his thoughts evaporated some time ago, yet his mind churns on in the darkness. He realized then that he had been holding his breath, and he let his air out in a rush, twinging with pain. The pain brought tears to his eyes.

"H-hey, what's wrong with him?" Dark Ignis asked worriedly as he looked at Holysaber.

Ryuki gasped when Holysaber's face whitened and fell on his knees. Her biggest fear now came true at the worst possible moment.

Holysaber looked at his hands. He saw the small hands, the ones he had ten years ago. He mentally returned to when he was still 7 years old. He couldn't move his little body at all. No. He didn't want to move anymore. He was too exhausted. He wanted to go back home. He had had enough. How many Duels they'd force him to do until they're satisfied? Hadn't he already fought enough? What had he ever done that he deserves this? Was it because he slacked off from his school studies? Was it because he secretly broke his mother's favorite vase? Was it because he lied to his father wanting to buy a book when he actually used the money given to buy a toy? Because he wasn't a good boy?

I can't take this anymore…

I don't want to do this anymore…

I don't want to Duel anymore…

I don't want to be in pain anymore…

If living means I must continue being in pain, I'd rather die!

The thought hit him then.

Die.

That's right. That's the right answer, isn't it? Even if he went back home, nobody would be waiting for him. His parents were not there anymore to welcome him back. But, if he died, he could be with his parents. They'll be together forever in Heaven. Nobody can hurt them over there. They'll be happy forever and ever. That's right. Not even the evilest person in the world can reach him if he's in the afterlife, right?

If I die, I will be free from this pain.

If I die, I won't have to Duel anymore.

He just needs to stay still then. Give up on everything. Don't do anything. Don't try to fight back. Just let it end.

I can finally be…

"Holysaber!"

As he was about to drown in the dark depths, a voice jolted him awake. His swimming vision started to return. Before his eyes could see anything, his head turned to his right side, following where the voice was coming from. Like a spell just had been cast on him, his foggy vision cleared, and he could see Ryuki standing over there.

Ryuki was fidgeting. From the way her teeth repeatedly retract from her lower lip indicated that she was trying her best not to bite her lip. Her hands were trembling, which she wrung together in hope of stopping the trembling. Though her eyes looked like she couldn't bear to watch him and wanted to look away, she didn't. Her eyes stayed on him and only him. Their eyes met.

"Let's go back home together!"

Ryuki finally yelled out. This was the only thing she could think of to help her childhood friend right now. Usually, she would embrace him as tight as she could, and if he started to bite his tongue, she would use her hand as something for him to bite. But that won't be possible in this situation. The only thing she could do right now was to remind him. To remind him that she'll be there with him. He wasn't alone like he was ten years ago.

And that's exactly what Holysaber needed to hear.

His time had stopped after that incident ten years ago. No matter how much he tried to forget, those dark days kept chaining him down, refusing to let him go. There were many times he had thought of giving up. The ones who held him, the ones who helped him every time he had given up was Kazue, who never left his side since his return that day, and…

" *Even if it takes time, I'm sure you'll enjoy dueling again one day, Kento."*

His best friend who took him out of his shell. If it weren't for his best friend, he wouldn't be here Dueling. Let alone Dueling, he wouldn't have been able to wear a Duel Disk if his best friend didn't give him the courage to try. He wouldn't have been able to touch a card if not for his best friend giving him the push he needed. Even though he's gone now, everything that he had taught him still etched deeply in Holysaber's heart.

" *I can't give up. If I lose, he'll target Ryuki and the others. I can't let that happen. I already lost one friend. I don't want to lose another friend."*

Holysaber slowly stood up once more. The fear was still there, but it wouldn't stop him. Questions he had about the mysterious assailant were forgotten. He couldn't be careless about them now. He mustn't think of anything that is unnecessary. Focus on the task at hand. If he wants to protect his friend, he must win. Losing is not an option. Don't think of anything but to win.

" *I won't let him lay a finger on Kazue!"*

BADUMP

Holysaber felt his soul was brought to a different space as the beating in his heart intensified. He felt a pulse then, coming from his Deck. He saw it. A figure of a man. There was no word spoken between them, yet Holysaber somehow knew that he was calling for him. He has been waiting for him.

"My Turn!" Holysaber drew Saint Kuriboh from his Deck, and immediately summoned it. "From my hand, I summon Saint Kuriboh!"

Saint Kuriboh (CYBERSE/DIVINE/ATK: 300/DEF: 200/LV: 1)

"When a DIVINE-Attribute monster is Normal or Special Summoned to my Field, I can Special Summon Olympios Stratos - Lerefs from my hand!" Holysaber summoned a monster in the form of a humanoid man with short blond hair and red eyes with white robes over red garbs, both laced with silver outlines and wielding a bible.

Olympios Stratos - Lerefs (CYBERSE/DIVINE/ATK: 1000/DEF: 500/LV: 4)

"I activate Lerefs' second effect! Once per Turn, I can halve its ATK to add 1 Olympios Stratos Spell Card from my Deck to my hand."

Olympios Stratos - Lerefs ATK: 1500 = 1250

"I activate Field Spell: Mount Olympus!" As Holysaber activated the Field Spell, their surroundings changed to that of a grassy field filled with clouds and white pillars in the shape of 12 Olympian Gods in Greek mythology.

"When this card is activated, I can add 1 Olympios Stratos monster from my Deck to my hand." Holysaber added one card from his Deck.

"Mount Olympus' second effect! Once per Turn, I can discard a card in my hand to Special Summon 1 Level 5 or lower Olympios Stratos monster from my Deck in Defense Position." Holysaber immediately discarded that he just drew to summon a monster in the form of a humanoid woman with long blond hair that is tied back in a small ponytail by small blue bow and blue eyes with same attire as Lerefs but with blue garb and wielding a silver-colored staff decorated with blue jewels.

Olympios Stratos - Lereia (CYBERSE/DIVINE/ATK: 2000/DEF: 0/LV: 5)

His heart was pounding faster, the voice that only he could hear became louder, and the form that only he could see became clearer.

Saint Kuriboh turned at him and smiled, which Holysaber returned the same.

"I'm sorry making you wait… Let's do this!" Holysaber's gaze sharpened. He raised his hand up.

"Appear! The circuit that lights up the future!" As Holysaber declared, Arrowhead portal appeared above him.

"Arrowhead confirmed! The summoning condition is 2 effect monsters. I set Saint Kuriboh, Lerefs, and Lereia in the Link Markers! Circuit Combined!" Saint Kuriboh, Lerefs, and Lereia turned into hurricanes that went to the Bottom-Left marker, Top marker, and Right marker, respectively.

"Sacred sword that embodies hope. Descend from the heavenly sky and guide the tormented souls away from evil oppressors! Link Summon! Appear, Link 3, Olympios Stratos - Elpizo Harpe!" Holysaber summoned the Link Monster in the form of a humanoid male with white and silver armor with lavender spikes on the knees and pauldrons and holding a white harpe sword on the right hand.

Olympios Stratos - Elpizo Harpe (CYBERSE/DIVINE/LINK/ATK: 2300/LNK: 3/LM: Bottom-Left, Top, Right)

"Oh! Here it is! Divine Ignis' ace monster! It's been forever since I last saw it!" Dark Ignis cheered happily at the sight of the familiar Link Monster. With that monster summoned on the Field, Dark Ignis was confident that Holysaber's victory had now been assured.

"Trap Card: Ensnaring Tornado! When my opponent Special Summoned a monster from the Extra Deck, that monster can only attack WIND Attribute monster I control with the highest ATK!" The attacker opened his face-down card the moment Elpizo Harpe appeared on the Field. The tornado came out and its force began to pull the Link Monster towards it.

"I activate Lereia's effect! When this card is in the Graveyard and I control a DIVINE-Attribute Link Monster on my Field, I can Special Summon it to the zone pointed by the Link Monster's Link Arrow, but at the end of Turn, Lereia is banished!" Holysaber summoned back Lereia in the zone pointed by Elpizo Harpe's Bottom-Left Arrow.

"I activate Elpizo Harpe's effect! When this card points to a monster, it gains an ATK equal to the difference between the ATK of a monster linked by its arrow and my current LP! Miracle Invocation!" Elpizo Harpe held his sword close to his chest with its blade facing downwards. His body glowed as Lereia pointed staff at the Link Monster and gave her energy. Holysaber's LP was 400 while Lereia's ATK was 2000, making it 1600 difference and Elpizo Harpe's ATK increased equal to that point.

Olympios Stratos - Elpizo Harpe ATK: 2300 = 3900

"Now it's ATK is higher than Dracossack!" Ryuki exclaimed in relief. Now Holysaber has his chance. She could see the path to victory for him.

"Battle! I attack Mecha Phantom Beast Dracossack with Elpizo Harpe!" Holysaber declared Battle Phase. Elpizo Harpe leaped forward, gripping his sword tight, ready to raise it.

"At this moment, Mount Olympus' last effect is activated! During Battle Phase, all Olympios Stratos monster gains 200 ATK for each Olympios Stratos monster in my Graveyard!" Holysaber added. There were 5 Olympios Stratos monsters in his Graveyard, which made the total ATK that Elpizo Harpe and Lereia received was 1000 points.

Olympios Stratos - Elpizo Harpe ATK: 3900 = 4900

Olympios Stratos - Lereia ATK: 2000 = 3000

"Go, Elpizo Harpe! Katharos Slash!"

Despite the incoming attack, the unknown assailant didn't look perturbed. He merely stood still and watched as Elpizo Harpe swung his sword down at the Xyz Monster, cutting it down into two and blew it up, destroying the Xyz Monster completely.

Unknown LP: 2400 = 0

The assailant was blown away, falling on his back. He lay still, staring at Holysaber who let out a sigh of relief. Behind the mask, he closed his eyes, focusing on the voice speaking to him from the other side.

[[Good job. You have successfully accomplished your mission.]]

NEXT CHAPTER

Chapter 2 - Pursuit of the Truth

ORIGINAL CARDS:

Holysaber's Card

Saint Kuriboh (CYBERSE/DIVINE/EFFECT/ATK: 300/DEF: 200/LV: 1)

When Saint Kuriboh is on the Field, all DIVINE-Attribute monsters cannot be destroyed by Battle or Card effect (except itself). As long as this card is pointed by an Olympios Stratos Link Monster, you'll recover 200 LP each time both players perform Link Summon.

Olympios Stratos - Akolouthos (CYBERSE/DIVINE/ATK: 300 / DEF: 1000 / LV: 3) - When there's an Olympios Stratos monster whose ATK or DEF is changed, that monster can attack twice, but at the end of the Turn, this card will be sent to the Graveyard.

Olympios Stratos - Archon (CYBERSE/DIVINE/ATK: 200/DEF: 1000/LV: 2) - When you don't have any cards on your Spell or Trap Zone, you can Special Summon Olympios Stratos - Archon from your hand.

Olympios Stratos - Kalogeros (CYBERSE/DIVINE/ATK: 1500/DEF: 1000/LV: 5) - When you control two or more Olympios Stratos monsters on your Field, you can Special Summon this card from your hand.

Hymn of Sleep (Trap Card) - When your opponent declared Battle Phase while you have a face-up DIVINE-Attribute monsters in your Graveyard, you can change that monster's position to Defense Position.

Olympios Stratos - Lerefs (CYBERSE/DIVINE/ATK: 1000/DEF: 500/LV: 4) - When a DIVINE-Attribute monster is Normal or Special Summoned to your Field, you can Special Summon Olympios Stratos - Lerefs from your hand. Once per turn, you can halve its ATK to add 1 Olympios Stratos Spell Card from your Deck to your hand.

Mount Olympus (Field Spell) - When this card is activated, you can add 1 Olympios Stratos monster from your Deck to my hand. Once per Turn, you can discard a card in your hand to Special Summon 1 Level 5 or lower Olympios Stratos monster from your Deck in Defense Position. During Battle Phase, all Olympios Stratos monster gains 200 ATK for each Olympios Stratos monster in your Graveyard.

Olympios Stratos - Lereia (CYBERSE/DIVINE/ATK: 2000/DEF: 0/LV: 5) - Once per Turn,while this card is in the Graveyard, you can banish 1 DIVINE monster in the Graveyard to negate the effect of a monster on the Field.

Olympios Stratos - Elpizo Harpe (CYBERSE/DIVINE/LINK/ATK: 2300/LNK: 3/LM: Bottom-Left, Top, Right) - When this card points

to a monster, it gains an ATK equal to the difference between that monster's ATK and your current LP. (More effect to be added later)

Unknown's Card

Air Force Gear (Magic Card) - If you control two or more Machine Type Tokens on the Field, you can Special Summon 1 Level 4 or lower Mecha Phantom Beast from your Deck. You can banish this card and a Machine Type monster in your Graveyard to switch the ATK of a Machine Type monster you control with another monster on either player's Field until the end of this Turn.

Aerial Blow (Quick-Play Spell) - When a WIND Attribute Monster you control inflicts battle damage to opponent, that opponent will be inflicted additional damage equal to half of a WIND Attribute monster I control

Ensnaring Tornado (Trap Card) - When your opponent Special Summon a monster from the Extra Deck, that monster can only attack WIND Attribute monster you control with the highest ATK.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

How is it for the first chapter? It became longer than I thought it would. My hands won't stop typing. I guess I overdid it? I still hope you enjoy reading it. I'm sorry if you think it's too long. (^_^)

Kento uses "Olympios Stratos" deck, which is an original archetype that doesn't exist in the game, so all the cards would be purely my own creations. Its monsters are all DIVINE-Attribute monsters. Unlike the DIVINE-Attribute monsters in the YGO manga that is considered extremely powerful and only for god monsters, DIVINE-Attribute monsters here are still powerful but not to the point of, for example, how the Egyptian God Cards are treated in the original YGO manga and such. But it's considered ultra rare cards that only Kento possesses it. There are other things too, but further detail would be a spoiler, so I'll stop here.

Unlike my ARC-V fanfics, I decided not to include the next chapter preview because I think that not knowing what will happen beforehand would incite more curiosity and give more surprises for the next chapter. But if you prefer for me to include a preview of the next chapter, I'll reconsider adding it in the next chapter.

TRIVIA

- Sotoba is a wooden plank frequently to be seen in cemeteries and monastery grounds in Japan. Inscriptions on the board are usually the name of the deceased. They are Buddhist prayer sutras for the deceased. Traditionally they are burned at the end of the year and replaced at the beginning of the new year to keep the prayers fresh.

- Like Yusaku's Playmaker pseudonym, Kento's online pseudonym, Holysaber, is based on his own name. His family name, Hijiri is written with kanji means holy or sacred. His first name, Kento, is written with kanji . The kanji (ken) means sword or blade. If following the order of Japanese naming, his name should be Hijiri Kento, and thus, the name Holysaber (not including the kanji). Alternatively, Kento's name can also be read as "Kendo", referring to him learning kendo with his uncle.

- Kazue's online pseudonym, Ryuki, is written with the kanji (ryuu), which means dragon, and kanji (hime, alternatively can be read as ki), which means princess, so her pseudonym means Dragon Princess. The choice of her name is related to the deck she's using.

- Kento's deck, Olympios Stratos, is Greek for Olympian Army. It is based on Greek mythological deities, objects, and the sorts. I initially wanted to give the deck name Caelestia Ordo, which means Heavenly Order in Latin, because Lightning's Armatos Legio is also a Latin name, but decided to go with Greek to give it more distinction and it fits more with the theme that I've decided.

- Meaning of Olympia Stratos monsters' name in Greek:

1. Akolouthos: Follower or attendant

2. Archon: Ruler

3. Kalogeros: Monk, friar

4. Lerefs: Priest

5. Lereia: Priestess

6. Elpizo Harpe: "Elpizo" means hope, while harpe is a sword in Greek mythology famously known to be used by Perseus to cut Medusa's head.

Please do not forget to review this chapter. I'd like to know your opinion, feedback, criticism, etc.

Pursuit of the Truth

RESPONSE TO REVIEWS:

Thank you to ***tsukikami02, T.V. 2000, Hell Kaiser Younes, HunterHQ*** for reading and reviewing the previous chapter.

HunterHQ: I already told you through DM, but just in case, the masked Duelist from the previous chapter is not Blood Shepherd. Please read the characters' description, the only thing that was the same between them was the prosthetic arm.

I managed to complete this chapter thanks to a one day holiday over here that gave me time to write, but I still can't promise the next chapter can be updated as fast as this one.

I hope you'll enjoy reading this chapter.

CHAPTER 2

Pursuit of the Truth

Shinjitsu no Tsuikyū

Cafe Nagi - Central Plaza - Den City

The Central Plaza in the afternoon was a bit crowded. Not a surprise since this was the time for students and workers usually going home. Some people usually like to take a stop at the plaza to hang out with their friends or coworkers, watch a Dueling event shown on the big screen, or simply enjoy a certain hot dog from a hot dog truck selling there. The owner of the hot dog truck, as usual, was cooking the sausage for the hotdog. He was a young man with fair skin and grey

eyes. His purple hair comes to the base of his neck, and it has multiple small bangs brushed over to hide his forehead, and he also sports a small goatee. He wears a brown trench coat over a purple hoodie with a bronze zipper and light blue shirt, and teal pants tucked into burgundy boots with prominent black soles. And not forgetting his cafe's trademark white apron with a picture of a hotdog in the shape of a dog printed on it.

For Shoichi Kusanagi, the owner of Cafe Nagi, the hot dog truck, afternoon and evening were the most times where he made profit from selling his hot dogs. This was especially true whenever there's a big event in the plaza where crows would gather, and he would make a killing from the many customers coming to buy his hot dogs to fill their bellies as they're watching the big screen.

And usually, around this time after school hours, his partner and favorite customer should've come by now. But strangely, he hasn't arrived yet.

It has been three months since the final battle against Knights of Hanoi. To break the chains that have been binding them to the past for ten long years, he and his partner fought against Hanoi, the ones responsible for the kidnapping case known as the Lost Incident that happened ten years ago. The incident had scarred his partner and his younger brother. His younger brother was even in worse condition, his mind broke to the point he was unresponsive. For ten years, he had been trapped in his own mind, doing nothing but staying in his room unless being helped. Almost like a soulless puppet.

"Kusanagi-san."

Just when he thought of that, the person he had been waiting for arrived. Yusaku Fujiki.

"Yusaku. You came later than you usually do. Did something happen at school?" Kusanagi asked while preparing a hotdog for Yusaku.

"Shima dragged me to Duel Club and forced me to stay there for a bit." Yusaku answered. He placed his bag on one of the tables provided by Kusanagi for his customers before taking a seat himself.

"What were you doing in the Duel Club?" Kusanagi asked. Ever since the battle with Hanoi three months ago, he wished for Yusaku to return to his normal life, making more friends and hanging out with them like an ordinary boy his age does. If he joins a school club, he's happy for him because that means Yusaku has begun to socialize with his schoolmates.

"Not different from the last time I visited." Yusaku answered. The first and the last time he visited Duel Club was because he had been following Aoi in hope of gaining intel from her since her brother works for SOL Technologies, which was a failure because of his lack of social skill and Aoi's own wariness. Since then, he didn't visit Duel Club again until today.

"There's a talk about the rumored seventh Attribute, the DIVINE-Attribute." Yusaku recalled.

"DIVINE-Attribute. People said it was just a rumor, but we know it does exist, doesn't it? Even if we've never seen it ourselves." Kusanagi turned his attention to the topic, giving the freshly made hotdog to Yusaku, who accepted it.

When they confronted the leader of Knights of Hanoi, Revolver, he revealed that the Lost Incident, also known as Hanoi Project, was started by a scientist named Kiyoshi Kogami, who's also Revolver's own father. Seven children were kidnapped and forced to Duel for six months in order to create seven A.I.s with free will, the Ignis. One of those A.I.s, the Dark Ignis, nicknamed Ai, was based on Yusaku, and the A.I. assisted them in defeating Knights of Hanoi. It was then they learned that other than the six Attributes publicly known, exist a seventh Attribute that only a few knew its existence more than just a rumor.

"Revolver and Ai confirmed its existence along with the existence of Divine Ignis." Yusaku remembered that time when Revolver explained everything to them. The revelation was surprising since he had never seen anybody having the DIVINE-Attribute cards before.

"But the seventh Attribute is extraordinary that only Divine Ignis could create them. Not even Dr. Kogami could recreate the DIVINE-Attribute monsters. Ai said that he escaped the Cyberse World together with the Divine Ignis, but they got separated." Kusanagi also recalled what he remembered from their conversation back then. It was already over now, so maybe there was no point thinking about it.

"Hanoi is gone. Ai must be with his Ignis friends in his home now, including the Divine Ignis." Kusanagi thought positively, imagining Ai happily reuniting with his friends after five years separated from them.

"Yeah…"

Yusaku answered in his usual tone, but Kusanagi noticed something different. Looking at Yusaku who was still munching his hotdog, his eyes were glancing at his Duel Disk. The gaze that Yusaku has while staring at his own Duel Disk was something that Kusanagi had never seen before. He's not an expert in reading a person's emotions, but he knew Yusaku long enough to recognize the tinge of emotion in those eyes, and it was pleasantly surprising.

"What's this? Do you miss Ai?" Kusanagi asked teasingly, grinning from ear to ear.

"No way. It's finally peace and quiet at home without him bothering me anymore." Yusaku denied calmly. His voice clear and his expression as neutral as usual.

People who don't know him would've believed his smooth answer, but not Kusanagi. Whether Yusaku likes to admit it or not, a bond has been formed between him and Ai, the Ignis based on him. He

and Yusaku got along well, but there was never someone who would speak to and treat Yusaku the way Ai did. Now, Kusanagi felt it was too bad that Ai decided to leave them. Maybe they should've asked him to stick around for a bit longer or to one day come visit them again.

"How is your brother, Kusanagi-san?" Yusaku asked, trying to change the subject. Kusanagi decided not to tease him further than that and went along with it.

"Jin has been going out more lately. He still doesn't talk much, but this is the first step of him getting better." Kusanagi revealed. Jin was still unresponsive when he spoke to him, but he at least didn't waste his days doing nothing in his room anymore. Before, no matter what he or the doctor did, Jin wouldn't even take a single step out of his room.

"That's good." Yusaku felt relieved hearing that, happy for Kusanagi.

His mind then thought of the rest of the children. Not counting Specter who was with Hanoi, he wondered how the other remaining four children were faring. He had settled the score with his past and was now ready to move on with his life, no longer bound by the Lost Incident. How about them though?

" *Whoever they are, wherever they are, I hope they can be free from the past that bound us."*

Cyberse World - Network

Holysaber huffed before falling on his knees. All his energies left him the moment his opponent's LP was reduced to zero. It was like a dream. He actually did it. He managed to push away his trauma and won a Duel. Whenever those terrifying memories resurfaced, he'd usually go stiff, both body and mind, or in the worst scenario, experience a panic attack. For the first time in his life, he

successfully pushed his trauma and continued his Duel to the end. And even better, he won his Duel.

He looked at the Deck inserted in his Duel Disk. He could hear the voices of the monsters from this Deck. They were happy for him.

"Kuri!"

Saint Kuriboh appeared next to him, once again making itself comfortable on his shoulder. Holysaber tenderly caressed the monster's fur. He owed Saint Kuriboh the most. It was thanks to Saint Kuriboh that he got the Deck to protect himself. And he was also grateful to the monsters that helped him in his Duel. It was because of their help that he could achieve victory.

"Thanks, guys. I couldn't do it without you." Holysaber expressed his gratitude.

"Holysaber!" Ryuki ran to his side now that the Duel was over. Dark Ignis and Linkuriboh also followed suit. She quickly checked his condition, holding his face with both hands, turning it left to right. "Are you all right? You're not hurt anywhere? Do you feel dizzy?"

"Yeah, I'm fine. Sorry to worry you, Ryuki." Holysaber carefully pulled her hands away from his face before getting up.

"You're not bad! I never thought that anyone other than Divine Ignis could use that Deck so well!" Dark Ignis exclaimed in excitement, thoroughly impressed.

Holysaber smiled in embarrassment, but quickly turned serious when he remembered that they were not done yet. There are still some things that need to be answered. He turned to his opponent who was just back to his feet.

"Answer my question now. Who are you and why did you attack us?" Holysaber asked the unknown assailant, standing closer but keeping a considerable distance between them.

"That's right! Are you the one who destroyed my home?!" Dark Ignis joined in, angrily glaring at their attacker.

The unknown assailant briefly glanced at the A.I. before facing Holysaber.

"I have a message for you from my master." He finally spoke, surprising them.

"A message from your master?" Holysaber repeated in question. That means this person was not the real culprit. He was just taking orders. But for what purpose? If his duty was delivering a message, why did he attack them? For what purpose forcing him to Duel?

"If you wish to move on from your past, then pursue me, alongside Playmaker." The unknown attacker told the message as he was instructed.

"Playmaker? What does Playmaker have anything to do with this?" Holysaber couldn't think of anything that could connect Playmaker and this message he was receiving. Let alone meeting Playmaker, until now he had never even logged into LINK VRAINS. Why did they tell him to be with Playmaker?

"Because just like you, Playmaker was also trapped in that place ten years ago." The unknown attacker revealed.

Holysaber felt as if his blood was freezing when the revelation struck him. Trapped in that place ten years ago. That only referred to that white room where he was forced to Duel continuously. And this guy was saying that Playmaker was also trapped in that room and was forced to Duel like he did? After he was rescued, Holysaber did hear that there were other children other than him who were kidnapped and imprisoned in that place. Playmaker was one of them?

"Huh?" Dark Ignis shifted his attention from the unknown attacker to Holysaber, observing his reaction. The place that trapped Playmaker and Holysaber ten years ago. He meant the Lost Incident. From that

incident, he and his Ignis friends were born, modeled after the children who were kidnapped, with him being based on Playmaker. Now, the attacker said that Holysaber was one of those children. Judging from Holysaber's expression, that appears to be the case.

" *If he is like Playmaker, he's most likely based on Divine Ignis. That would explain Saint Kuriboh's behavior."* Everything made perfect sense for the Dark Ignis now. The way Saint Kuriboh was acting around Holysaber and his affinity with Olympios Stratos Deck must be because they could somehow sense Holysaber as Divine Ignis' Origin.

The moment he mentioned what happened ten years ago, Ryuki protectively stood in front of Holysaber, blocking him from the unknown attacker.

"How did you know about that? Who exactly are you and your master?" Ryuki questioned.

Neither she nor Holysaber ever told anybody outside their family and psychiatrist about Holysaber's involvement in the kidnapping incident. She didn't even tell her deceased boyfriend because she was waiting until Holysaber himself decided to tell him. Yet, this person and the one behind him knew. They were not ordinary people. The fact that they knew about Holysaber's past also means that most likely they knew Holysaber's real identity.

"If you wish to know the answer, then do as what my master told you." The unknown assailant tapped his Duel Disk. His body started to disintegrate into data.

"Wait!" Holysaber tried to reach out the man, but the unknown assailant disappeared in a flash before his hand could grasp him.

Instead of getting an answer, all he got was more questions. One thing for sure, whoever was behind this had been targeting him from the very beginning. They knew about his past and lured him all the way to this world to force him to a Duel, even providing him with an

online avatar. He didn't know yet what their purpose was, but it's related to what happened ten years ago. Otherwise, they wouldn't have told him to team up with Playmaker to overcome his past. Although, he doubted they goad him to overcome his past out of a good will.

"Hey, you're also a victim of the Lost Incident like Playmaker? You were kidnapped and locked up in a white room where you were forced to Duel?" Dark Ignis asked, turning to Holysaber again.

Holysaber couldn't answer. He didn't even listen to the A.I.'s question. There is too much information that his mind needs to process. Everything that just happened all rooted to the incident ten years ago. The mastermind behind the unknown assailant no doubt was trying to dig up that incident back to him, telling him to face his past.

But…

"I… I'm going back…" Holysaber couldn't stand to be in this place any longer. He activated the program set by Ryuki and immediately logged out.

"Holysaber!" Ryuki understood why Holysaber felt the need to log out right away. She couldn't blame him after what had just transpired. She'd like to ask the A.I. about Playmaker and the incident ten years ago, but she's more worried about her childhood friend's mental condition.

"Sorry, I'm going back too. Give our regards to Playmaker." Ryuki told the A.I. and his Kuriboh. Even though Playmaker hadn't been sighted for the past three months, she knew that they'd eventually meet because his A.I. partner would certainly relay what happened to him. If Playmaker is indeed a kidnapping victim like Holysaber, Playmaker would try to contact them one way or another.

"Huh?! Wait, wait a minute!" Dark Ignis tried to stop Ryuki from leaving as well, but she already pressed the return program and

logged herself out, leaving Dark Ignis with Linkuriboh. If the A.I. had some hair, he would've already pulled it from exasperation.

"Geez… ! Don't just leave me hanging here!"

Kazue's Room - Hibiki Residence

When Kazue opened her eyes, she was back in her room. She turned to the seat next to her and found Kento was sitting hunched over while covering his face with his right hand. His left hand on his knee was trembling. He must be starting to recall bits of the past incident. At least he didn't reach for any sharp tools, so he hasn't started having one of his panic attacks. She sighed in a bit relief at that.

Kazue left her seat and kneeled next to Kento. Though his face is covered, it's clear to her that he's trying his best not to break down. He managed to push aside his trauma during that Duel, but that was more driven by his survival instinct. Now that they are not in danger, that drive that pushed away his trauma also left him.

"Kento." Kazue carefully placed her hand on top of his left hand. His trembling began to slow down. She didn't say anything else, waiting until Kento finally removed his hand and turned to her.

"Sorry, Kazue…" Kento apologized, leaning his back to relax. He was about to get lost in his dark memories until Kazue's voice called him out. If it weren't for her, he would've experienced a panic attack.

"Just tell me if you feel ready to talk." Kazue stood up, planning to go to the kitchen to get some refreshment and snack for him. She's also planning to tell her little brother that they must cancel the plan to play because Kento isn't feeling well and must return home earlier.

Kento held her hand, stopping her from leaving the room.

"No. I'm okay. Let's talk now. About what happened in that place." Kento told her. They shouldn't delay this talk. Their safety might be at risk after all.

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah."

Kazue was concerned, but she sat back again, waiting for Kento to speak first.

"Let's say… what that guy was saying about Playmaker was true… do you think I should try meeting Playmaker? At least to confirm his story?" Kento asked her. The thought of having to face his past scared him, but the idea that he'd be able to meet someone who also went through the same experience as him and understanding his pain also made him curious.

"I don't think that's my decision to make. It's yours, since this is concerning your past." She replied.

Kazue may have been Kento's childhood friend and had been helping him coping his trauma, but it's not her place to tell him what to do. She knew it's necessary for him to face his past if he wants to come to terms with it and overcome his trauma. However, facing his own past means having to remember his suffering back then. Those times he remembered the detail; he was close to opening death's door with his own hand. It's a big decision for Kento that needs careful consideration. It's pointless to force himself facing his past only to stop midway because he can't go through with it.

However…

"But maybe… speaking with someone who shared the same experience as yours will help you find the answer." She added.

She wasn't there with Kento, she wasn't there to experience the same suffering as him, so she couldn't say she understood Kento's

pain. Kento himself was also holding back certain things because he wanted to avoid causing worry for her and his family. But that only made her worry for him even more. It's not good for him to bottle up his pain like that. That's why, if Kento meets someone who also went through the same as him, maybe Kento will be more open, no longer holding back his pain and sadness.

"You don't need to be in a hurry. We don't know where Playmaker is anyway. It doesn't seem like he's going to return to LINK VRAINS anytime soon. Take your time to think this through." She doesn't know when Playmaker will appear again, and she doubted he'll just return immediately after what happened to them. That would be too convenient for them. The person who gave the message never gave them some sort of time limit to make their decision. Kento should still have plenty of time to think.

"Kurikuri!"

Kento and Kazue blinked when a cute voice joined in as if it was agreeing with what Kazue said. They turned to table where the voice came from, and their eyes widened upon seeing Saint Kuriboh coming out from Kento's Duel Disk.

"S-Saint Kuriboh?! Why are you in my Duel Disk?!" Kento was taken aback when the monster looked up to him from his Duel Disk. It was then he remembered that he was so in hurry to log out that he forgot the Deck from Saint Kuriboh still inserted in his Duel Disk, including Saint Kuriboh itself. The data of the Deck was brought back along as the result.

"I forgot. I should return this Deck." He was only borrowing this Deck to defend himself and Kazue from that mysterious Duelist. Now that they were safe, the Deck won't be needed anymore. And he was sure the real owner of the Deck would be looking for it.

"Kurikurikuri!" Saint Kuriboh made a gesture that appears to be a head shake.

"Looks like it wants you to keep the Deck. Since Saint Kuriboh itself gave it to you, I think it's okay for you to keep it." Kazue correctly interpreted Saint Kuriboh's gesture. The said monster smiled in confirmation of her interpretation.

"But, according to that A.I., this Deck belongs to his friend." Kento didn't feel it was right for him to keep the Deck belonging to someone else when he didn't even have permission from the owner.

"And Saint Kuriboh belongs to that friend of his and approved you. Besides, can we be sure that Playmaker's A.I. is still in that place? He could've returned to Playmaker's side after we left." Kazue left right after Kento logged out without questioning the A.I., so she didn't have anything to contact him. His so-called home world was destroyed by someone, the likelihood he'll stay in that desolated land was highly unlikely. There's no meaning to stay in the remains of his home with only Linkuriboh accompanying him.

"Kuri…"

Kento faltered when Saint Kuriboh's eyes started to become teary, and he could've sworn he saw sparkles on its faces. It was like seeing a puppy begging not to be thrown away. That face really hit hard on his conscience. Like it or not, Kazue made a good point. There was no guarantee that the A.I. they met and his Linkuriboh will still be in that place. It would be cruelly ungrateful of him if he leaves Saint Kuriboh all alone in that desolated land after the monster helped him against his attacker.

"Okay. You can stay with me until we meet your owner." Kento smiled in defeat. He'll consider this as payback for lending him the Deck. It's not like he hates Saint Kuriboh. On the contrary, the monster was loveable that it's impossible for him to hate it.

"I'll materialize the Deck for you. I'm also curious about this Deck with DIVINE-Attribute and Cyberse Type monsters. It's okay, right, Saint Kuriboh?" Kazue asked the Kuriboh as she picked up Kento's

Duel Disk. This will be a perfect opportunity to analyze the Deck. You wouldn't find DIVINE-Attribute cards anywhere.

"Kuri!" Saint Kuriboh gave her permission.

With that, Kazue took Saint Kuriboh with her to start the process of materializing the Deck into physical cards with the device on her work desk.

"They get along well so quick." Kento commented in a low voice. While waiting until all the cards were materialized, Kento made himself comfortable on top of Kazue's bed.

" *It never crossed my mind to try reaching out to another victim like me. Now that I'm thinking about it, how are they now? Are they as traumatized as I am? Have they moved on?"* He never thought about them before because he was too busy dealing with his own trauma. Kento can't stop wondering about them now. He was afraid of Duel because of that incident. It's understandable that they also shared the same trauma and refused to Duel anymore.

" *But Playmaker is Dueling. Does that mean he has moved on?"* For ten years, Kento has struggled to overcome his trauma. He made some progress, but still far from a full recovery. That moment he managed to push away his trauma and won the Duel was more because of desperate need to survive taking over him rather than truly overcoming his trauma. He still can't enjoy Dueling like he used to. However, Playmaker Dueled and he is a skilled Duelist on top of it despite his past. Can he become like Playmaker?

"As Kazue said, maybe if I meet and speak with Playmaker, I'll know the answer…"

If he were to describe the landscape before him, it would be a utopian paradise. What once was a barren land with a tower made of stone strapped to the ground cables has now evolved into a beautiful land. In its evolved state, the land was divided into six biomes

outside a hexagonal out-layer with six cities on the points. The cities were connected by grasslands that outline a large city surrounding the pillar, which has been weathered down and now tethered to six metallic pillars hovering above the outer cities with yellow spheres. The original tower was in the middle of a deep hole.

Each biome represents a Monster Card Attributes. Hot fiery volcano that represented Fire. Blue ocean that represented Water. Breezy valley that represented Wind. Rocky mountain that represented Earth. Bright desert that represented Light. Deep gorge that represented Dark. Tranquil steep hill that represented Divine.

Above the sky, a lone A.I. was floating in the air, enjoying the beautiful sight of his home world…

… until he was tackled by a hug from his fellow A.I.

"Divine Ignis! You're finally home! Do you know how long I've been waiting for you?"

Divine Ignis staggered by the sudden hug, having been caught completely off guard. It only took a few seconds for him to steady himself and then pushed his friend's face away from him.

"Nice to see that you still don't know how not to invade someone's personal space, Dark Ignis." Divine Ignis told his friend with his hand still covering his face.

"Don't overreact, I only went out for three days, you know." He said before finally letting go.

"But it's like forever! It's boring without you here!" Dark Ignis pouted childishly.

"Are my monsters not enough to keep you company? Didn't you have fun playing with them?" Divine Ignis already anticipated that the Dark Ignis would be bored, so he had arranged with his monsters to keep his best friend company while he was away.

"More like babysitting when I'm with them! I can hardly rest with them around! How in the world you take care of them?" Dark Ignis protested. He felt like a kindergarten teacher being forced to follow the whims of his friend's monsters whose idea of playing involved him being crushed by the pile of their bodies, piggyback them, or being hit by mud they threw at him.

"All you need to do is care for them with love." Divine Ignis replied as if that was the obvious answer, which was met with a flat face from the Dark Ignis.

"Yeah right. Going out to observe humans has made you speaking nonsense." The dark-colored A.I. made a dismissive gesture. To this day, he still couldn't comprehend Divine Ignis' fascination with humans.

"I am serious though. We are AIs with free will. We are capable of being angry, sad, and happy. I don't think it's far-fetched that we are capable of love the same way humans do." Divine Ignis' expression was serene when he said it.

Divine Ignis had seen the cruelty and ugliness of humans. They were capable of hurting others for the smallest thing without caring of the consequences they would bring. However, he had also seen that humans were capable of love and kindness. They lend a hand to those in need and get helped themselves in return. And he found those good-natured humans fascinating.

"Does that mean you love humans?" Dark Ignis asked without looking. But when his friend didn't give an answer for a few seconds, Dark Ignis turned to his friend again. He was surprised to see his friend smiling down so merrily with his answer.

"Perhaps I am…"

"!"

Kento abruptly opened his eyes and sat up, awakening from his sleep. His heart was pounding. It's as if a hypodermic of adrenaline has been emptied into his carotid. He strained into the utter darkness, his breathing rate beginning to steady. Now fully getting ahold of his own mind, he began to recall the dream he just had.

That A.I. in his dream. There was no mistaking it, it was the A.I. that he saw yesterday in a vision during the Duel. No. Though he said it was a dream, it felt too real to be one. It was more like he had experienced it himself. Like he had possessed the Divine Ignis' body and became him for a moment.

"What was that…?"

Central Plaza - Den City - The Next Day

The dream he had last night was the button that pushed Kento to make up his mind to meet Playmaker like the mysterious assailant told him to. The problem is what must he do to contact Playmaker. The hero of LINK VRAINS had been absent for three months and hasn't made any appearance again. Since he was a skilled hacker, he didn't leave any traces online that could lead to him. Contacting the A.I. he met before was not possible either because neither he nor Kazue asked for his contact info.

He thought of making Playmaker return to LINK VRAINS again, but he has nothing that can catch his attention without making ruckus. Blue Angel once publicly challenged Playmaker, but the latter didn't come until later. That was a method that Kento would never try because he dislikes becoming a center of attention and Playmaker may as well ignore his challenge. The Deck lent by Saint Kuriboh consisted of monsters of Cyberse-Type, the same as Playmaker's monsters. Using the Deck as bait may also attract unwanted attention from bounty hunters who are targeting Playmaker, so he also scratched that method.

Kento stopped on his track when his nose smelled a delicious scent. He spotted a hotdog truck where the smell was coming from. He didn't eat much this morning and all the thinking made him hungry. He can't concentrate with an empty stomach, it's best to fill his belly first and think up a plan to find Playmaker.

"One hotdog, plea-"

Kento trailed off upon seeing who was cooking sausage. It was none other than his recently new classmate who sat next to him on his first day at school.

"Fujiki-kun?!" Kento said with a surprised tone.

"Hijiri." Fujiki curtly greeted him back.

"You're part timing here? But I thought students in our school are not allowed to take part time job?" Kento knew that he's not one to talk since he himself has a part-time job with Kazue's father, but it's not an ordinary part-time job and one that outsiders would ever know, so he won't really count that. Fujiki, on the other hand, he's working out in the open here, where usually students from their school hang out.

"I received special permission since I must pay for my apartment rent." Fujiki answered with his eyes still focused on the hotdog.

"You live by yourself?"

"Yeah. I moved from my home because it's closer to school."

If Fujiki had to move to get closer to school, he was most likely not from Den City. Commuting from outside to Den City can be a hassle considering not only the distance but also the crowds of people both by train and bus. It's suffocating. He wouldn't blame Fujiki deciding to move to avoid that.

"Is your part-time work your reason why you're not joining the Duel Club?" Kento asked, deciding to continue the conversation while

waiting until the hotdog is finished. From his observation, Fujiki didn't look like the type to join any clubs. He could be wrong though, which was why he asked. People shouldn't judge a book by its cover alone.

"No. I'm never interested in joining any club at school. Speaking of which, have you decided to join a club? I don't think you'll join the Duel Club since you're not interested, so I thought you'll choose other clubs." Fujiki asked back.

"You can tell?"

"There are three reasons why I know you're not interested in joining Duel Club." Fujiki raised his left hand as his dominant hand was still occupied with the sausage.

"First, you tried to refuse when Shima dragged you into the club room. It was never your intention to stop by the Duel Club." He raised his index finger to explain his first point. From the way Hijiri approached him and Shima, Yusaku could see that he just happened to pass by. His face also showed his clear reluctance when Shima mentioned the Duel Club.

"Second, you already said it yourself that you don't Duel often and use your Duel Disk for other purposes." He then raised his middle finger to explain his second point. Judging that Hijiri didn't have any Deck inserted in his Duel Disk, he's being honest. He Duels, but not as often to be considered a Duelist.

"Third, when the club president started to explain things about Duel, you're listening but there's no enthusiasm or passion from you. You were just being considerate of Shima and the club president." He raised his fourth finger to explain his last point. Throughout the explanation, Hijiri's expression that Yusaku discerned was that of disinterest. It seemed he already knew the general rules of Duel Monsters, but not interested enough to aim to become a Professional Duelist. And the way Hijiri looked at the disappointed Shima and respectful Hosoda, Hijiri decided that listening to them was the least he could do in hope of not offending them.

"I guess I'm an open book." Kento smiled in embarrassment from the three points that Fujiki made.

"You were also the same, Fujiki-kun. You could've refused or ignored Shima-kun and Hosoda-san, but you decided to stay until Hosoda-san finished. You're a nice person." Kento wasn't trying to flatter, that was his real thoughts. Fujiki was reluctant to be there, but instead of insisting on leaving or cutting off Shima and Hosoda, Fujiki listened from start to finish without complaining.

"It's not a big deal." Fujiki replied calmly. Kento smiled softly at his modesty. It was then Fujiki applied the sauces, finishing the order and extended it to Kento. "Here you go. One hotdog."

"Thanks." Kento paid and ate the hotdog immediately. It's tasty. He better take Kazue and Minoru to try out this hotdog next time. His attention turned to the TV screens showing Playmaker's bounty in LINK VRAINS.

"Fujiki-kun, are you a fan of Playmaker like Shima-kun?" Kento asked again. Fujiki already made it clear he has no interest in Duel Club, but that's a different matter. Maybe he's not interested in Duel Club, but he might still be interested in LINK VRAINS and Playmaker personally.

"If you asked because of my Duel Disk, no. The Duel Disk I'm using was a Duel Disk I've had since I was a child and I'm comfortable enough using it. It was simply a coincidence that Playmaker turned out to be using the same model." Fujiki answered calmly as usual.

"Then, how much do you know about Playmaker?" Kento knew that the likelihood of gaining intel from asking other people like this was very slim. That said, he also knew that sometimes things that seem or sound trivial may unexpectedly turn out to be a crucial clue. He didn't have any lead anyway, so a little hint would be fine.

"Are you a fan of him?" This time, it was Fujiki who asked.

"Oh, no. I'm just curious because a lot of people talked about him. Even Kazue's little brother idolized him. I only know based on what I heard from news and rumors." Kento made up an excuse.

"Sorry. I don't know much about him myself. I also just heard about him from news." To Kento's dismay, Fujiki couldn't provide him with any useful intel.

" *What should I do? Does attracting attention to myself using the Deck is the only way after all?"* Kento would be risking attracting many people who no doubt would be interested in DIVINE-Attribute cards if he does that, something he'd like to avoid. However, thinking about it again, attracting attention to himself may be inevitable if he were to be involved with Playmaker.

"Hello? Kusanagi-san?"

Kento noticed Fujiki is on a phone with someone. From what Fujiki said about the food truck, he must be talking to the owner. However, Fujiki's face suddenly looked alarmed.

"Got it! I'll go right away!" Fujiki quickly closed the phone and began to tidy up everything even though it was still noon.

"Fujiki-kun?" Kento asked in concern.

"Sorry, there's an emergency matter. I must close the shop now. See you tomorrow at school, Hijiri."

Kento didn't even have the chance to reply as Fujiki closed the truck. It must be very urgent if he was in a hurry like that. Whatever urgent matter that Fujiki has, Kento hoped that it'll go well for him. He decided to leave the hotdog truck. He himself has more important matters to do after all. Kento was only a few steps away from the plaza when he heard something the least that he expected.

"Hey, look! It's Playmaker!" A passerby pointed at the TV screen at the plaza.

"What?!" Kento turned around and looked at the TV. Exactly as the guy said, it was Playmaker. He's back to LINK VRAINS. He's chasing after someone whose whole body is gold colored.

Kento quickly overcame his shock as he saw the opportunity he'd been looking for. This was his chance to meet up with Playmaker. Maybe his only chance even. He quickly looked for a place where he can log in without anybody interfering. Luckily, there was one of Hibiki Enterprise's stores nearby. He just needed to show the ID Card that Kazue's father provided for him, and he's allowed to use whatever available for his uses. Kento borrowed a room and inserted his Deck into his Duel Disk.

"Into the VRAINS!"

LINK VRAINS - Network

Unlike before, he appeared in midair. Fortunately, He already saw on TV and Kazue already prepared a D-Board for him in advance. And so, once he emerged from the gate, he gracefully landed on his D-Board without a problem. The D-Board is silver in color with white on the sides, lavender fins in semblance of wings and lavender gems on the front. Kazue made it to fit his avatar. He'll be sure to repay her later.

This was his first time to be in LINK VRAINS riding a D-Board that he had only seen on TV screen before. Being here online directly hit differently. It was amazing. Never thought he'd be here now for a rather strange reason, namely, to meet Playmaker. If it was any other people other than Kazue heard his reason, they would mistake him to be a hardcore Playmaker fan.

" *First, I must show Playmaker that I don't have bad intentions."*

Holysaber gradually caught up to Playmaker, who was still chasing the mysterious Duelist in yellow. If Playmaker was chasing after that guy, he was most likely someone that Playmaker considered to be

an enemy. However, while still chasing after the yellow guy, a Duelist appeared and chasing after Playmaker. He wore purple with a green hat, red and blue mask with pink eyes, purple cape, black coat, blue shirt with green accents, black pants and boots with red sole and yellow star behind the boots. He wore a black glove on his left hand, and a prosthetic arm identical to the one worn by the masked Duelist from before.

Holysaber recognized him. Blood Shepherd. He was infamous among hackers as a A.I-hating bounty hunter who would pursue anyone who was unfortunate enough to become his target with ruthless fervency and willingly deployed dirty methods to accomplish his mission. Kazue mentioned that SOL Technologies employed a group of bounty hunters to capture Playmaker. Blood Shepherd must be one of them.

He felt a bit bad, but he was glad that Blood Shepherd came. Because he has given him the opportunity that he needed to gain Playmaker's trust. Since he is in LINK VRAINS, dueling is inevitable, especially against an opponent like Blood Shepherd. The thought of dueling brings shivers to his body.

"Calm down. I can do this. I did it that time. If I can focus on that feeling, I won't break." Holysaber tried to focus on that moment when he managed to defeat the unknown assailant before. He tried to recall that moment when Kazue's voice reached him. He tried to place himself in that moment. Opening his eyes again, his hands stopped trembling.

"Let's do this now." Holysaber sped up, getting closer to Playmaker and Blood Shepherd. From his Duel Disk, he launched a red cord and wrapped it around Blood Shepherd's wrist.

"What is this?!" Blood Shepherd followed to where the red cord leads until he saw Holysaber.

"Duel Anchor. It prevents us from logging out until we have a Duel." Holysaber told the bounty hunter.

Holysaber was glad that he decided to set up this feature in his Duel Disk. Actually, he set this program in case Playmaker refuses to listen to him if they were to meet. Kazue was the one who suggested it despite his reluctance. Fortunately, he could make use of this program without having to use it on the intended person. The bounty hunter's appearance made it convenient for him.

"Ah! You're the guy from before!"

Holysaber recognized the A.I. and Linkuriboh on Playmaker's Duel Disk. There's no mistaking them. They are the same A.I. and Linkuriboh he met yesterday. The A.I., or Dark Ignis, as he recalled in his dream, is pointing his finger at him in acknowledgment of them being acquaintance. This is even better than he imagined. They can vouch for him.

"You know him?" Playmaker asked his A.I.

"Well, kinda." The A.I. answered.

"My name is Holysaber. Playmaker, I know you have questions, but we can talk later. Let me handle this bounty hunter. You go after that guy." Holysaber told Playmaker. It was clear that Playmaker was in a hurry and couldn't afford to be distracted by this bounty hunter. Like it or not, Holysaber's arrival would help him.

"Playmaker, I think we can trust him. This guy saved me before." Playmaker's A.I. told his partner.

Holysaber appreciated the trust that the A.I. had for him. Perhaps Holysaber being a victim of the Lost Incident as they called it, also played a role in the A.I.'s decision. Playmaker looked hesitant for a second but considering that he has someone that he must catch up with, he didn't have any choice.

"I'll leave it to you then." Playmaker told Holysaber before speeding up his D-Board. Holysaber sighed in relief that Playmaker decided to trust him.

"You! Why are you getting in my way?!"

Holysaber turned to the bounty hunter, Blood Shepherd. The bounty hunter was understandably furious. He'll be getting on the bounty hunter's bad side because of this, but if this means he could speak with Playmaker then so be it.

"I have a business of my own with Playmaker. That's why I can't allow you to capture him." Holysaber raised his Duel Disk, challenging the bounty hunter.

"I won't show mercy to anybody who dares to challenge me." Blood Shepherd raised his Duel Disk as well.

Holysaber and Blood Shepherd sped up their D-Boards, following a different flow of Data Material from Playmaker's. Blood Shepherd got ahead of Holysaber, turning behind to face Holysaber as they began their match.

"Speed Duel!"

Holysaber LP: 4000

Blood Shepherd LP: 4000

"I'm going first! From my hand, I summon Drone Pawn!" Blood Shepherd summoned a grey-colored monster resembling a military aircraft in Attack Position in the Main Monster Zone.

Drone Pawn (MACHINE/WIND/ATK: 600/DEF: 0/LV: 1)

"I set two cards and end my Turn." Blood Shepherd ended his Turn.

" *A monster with low ATK and DEF and a face-down card. No matter how I look at it, he's setting a trap for me."* His opponent is the infamous professional bounty hunter. He mustn't underestimate him no matter how seemingly insignificant his move was.

"When no other monsters are on our Field, it can't be destroyed by Battle. And during the turn that it's attacked, after the battle, we regain LP equal to the damage we took." The A.I. from Blood Shepherd's Duel Disk explained Drone Pawn's effect.

Holysaber raised an eyebrow at that. He hates A.I. and yet he has an A.I. program on his Duel Disk?

"Is there any battle record about him?" Blood Shepherd asked.

"Negative. This is most likely the first time Holysaber logged into LINK VRAINS." The A.I. responded.

Holysaber eyed Blood Shepherd and the A.I. on his Duel Disk suspiciously. He knew that A.I. has many functions and it was understandable for a Duelist like Blood Shepherd to use it as nothing but a tool, but would Blood Shepherd really use an A.I. for crucial intel gathering when he hates A.I. so much?

" *Very well. I'll play along with whatever you are planning for now."* Holysaber placed his fingers on the top of his Deck. He recalled the rule of Speed Duel, which was different from the Master Duel he did yesterday. It has more restrictions than Master Duel and he never tried it even once before, so this would truly be his first time doing a Speed Duel.

Time to test his ability to adapt.

"My Turn! Draw!" Holysaber looked at the card he drew. It was a monster card. The monster wears a black academic robe with a stole paired with a stiff black cylindrical head covering, similar to a stovepipe hat but without a brim.

"I set a card." Holysaber set a card before picking the card he just drew. "From my hand, I summon Olympios Stratos - Kalimavkion!"

Olympios Stratos - Kalimavkion
(CYBSERSE/DIVINE/EFFECT/ATK: 500/DEF: 100/LV: 3)

"A DIVINE-Attribute Cyberse monster?!" Blood Shepherd couldn't hide his shock upon seeing the general information of the monster appear on his screen.

His surprise was shared by other people who were watching the Duel between them. Not only Holysaber was using a Cyberse Monster like Playmaker and Revolver, but the said monster's attribute also was one that was never seen before and only a piece of information circulated from hearsay.

"No way, so DIVINE-Attribute is real?"

"It's not a just rumor?"

"Who is that Duelist?"

The spectators watched in awe at the very first DIVINE-Attribute monster they have ever seen. Holysaber had expected such a reaction and their inevitable attention on him, but that was the least of his worry. He won't let anything distract him in his Duel.

"When I control exactly 1 Olympios Stratos monster on my Field, I can activate the effect of Olympios Stratos - Diakonos from my hand! I send this card to my Graveyard to Special Summon 1 Level 4 or lower Olympios Stratos monster from my Deck except itself!" Holysaber summoned a monster with a long-sleeved green mini-dress that bares her shoulders and has white lines at the center of the mini-dress to the base. The sleeves of her mini dress are a shade of white, and the remainder of her hands are covered in white gloves. Accompanying her attire is a lighter green mantle adorned with symmetric patterns.

Olympios Stratos - Mathitis (CYBERSE/DIVINE/EFFECT/ATK: 1300/DEF: 0/LV: 4)

"Set card cannot be activated." Blood Shepherd's A.I. suddenly said.

" *Can't be activated? Did Blood Shepherd try to use one of his Reverse Cards?"* Holysaber, again, was confused by his opponent's A.I.

It notified both Blood Shepherd and him that the card couldn't be activated, so that could only mean Blood Shepherd attempted to activate it. But Holysaber found it strange. It's his own card, no way Blood Shepherd doesn't know his own card's effect and the requirements to activate it. And none of the monsters on Holysaber's Field nor his hand have the effect to prevent his opponent from activating a card.

" *Could it be… !"* Holysaber was hit with a realization. If he was right, then he'll have to go with a backup.

"Kalimavkion can be treated as two materials." Holysaber revealed before raising his arm up.

"Appear! The circuit that lights up the future!" As Holysaber declared, Arrowhead portal appeared above him.

"Arrowhead confirmed! The summoning condition is 2 effect monsters. I set Kalimavkion and Mathitis to the Link Markers! Circuit Combined!" Kalimavkion, that was treated as two monsters went to the Bottom-Left and Top Link Markers, while Mathitis went to the Right Link Marker.

"Sacred sword that embodies hope. Descend from the heavenly sky and protect the tormented souls from evil oppressors! Link Summon! Appear, Link 3, Olympios Stratos - Elpizo Harpe!" Holysaber summoned his ace monster to the Extra Monster Zone in Attack Position.

Olympios Stratos - Elpizo Harpe (CYBERSE/DIVINE/LINK/ATK: 2300/LNK: 3/LM: Bottom-Left, Top, Right)

Holysaber was ready to make his next move, but Blood Shepherd, at that moment, pointed at his face-down card.

"I activate Continuous Trap Card: Capture Drone! When I control a Drone monster, I can target a Link Monster my opponent controls! That target has its effect negated, cannot be used as Link Material nor tributed, and it cannot attack!" The bounty hunter opened his reverse card. Purple-colored chains come out from the card and wraps itself around Elpizo Harpe, tying it in place.

"I knew it." Holysaber stated, not surprised by the chained Elpizo Harpe.

"You expected this?" Blood Shepherd asked.

"You're a bounty hunter famous for hating A.I.s. And yet you have an A.I. with you to provide information. I could only be suspicious. Sure enough, you purposely set your A.I. to provide false information to your opponent and let their guard down so you can take them by surprise. You never activated your card from the start, that was just a false info your A.I. notified to mislead your opponent." Holysaber replied.

"Hmph. Correct. Nobody decided that information provided by A.I.s is accurate. A.I.s are never to be trusted. They are nothing more but tools to be used to achieve my goal." Blood Shepherd commended his opponent's insight.

All of his opponents foolishly fell prey to the false information provided by his A.I. because of their heavy realiance to the program, giving him an easy victory. They were never on his level to begin with, so he could've won even without having to use such tactics. But Holysaber was different. Not only does he have a sharp intuition, he also properly assessed the information he knew about him and made a proper judgment. Blood Shepherd was honestly quite impressed.

"And that's exactly why, I already prepared for a backup! I activate Magic Card: Salpinx of Barter! I return 1 monster from my Graveyard to the Deck and then draw 2 cards!" Holysaber went for his alternate strategy, activating his Magic Card instead since his Main Phase hadn't begun thanks to Blood Shepherd's Trap.

Holysaber returned Kalimavkion to his Deck and then drew 2 cards. Among the two cards drawn, he picked one and activated it.

"I activate Magic Card: Bear's Breech! I banish 1 Spell or Trap card in my Graveyard to Special Summon a Level 4 or lower Olympios Stratos monster from my Deck with its ATK and DEF becomes 0!" Holysaber banished Salpinx of Barter to Special Summon Kalimavkion again to his Field.

"Appear once more, the circuit that lights up the future!" Holysaber once again performed a Link Summon, sending Kalimavkion treated as two monsters to the Bottom-Right and Bottom-Left Link Markers.

"Link Summon! Appear, Link 2, Olympios Stratos - Efcharis Archiereia!" Holysaber summoned a monster with long silver hair with hints of pink and red that is tied back in a high ponytail behind a red and gold headband. She has green eyes and wears a long-sleeved, red, white, black, and lavender dress. She wears red and white heels with ribbons that wrap around her legs. Her shoes and dress are decorated with violet gems.

Olympios Stratos - Efcharis Archiereia (CYBERSE/DIVINE/LINK/ATK: 2000/LNK: 2/LM: Bottom-Right, Bottom-Left)

"Battle! I attack Drone Pawn with Efcharis Archiereia!" Holysaber declared his delayed Battle Phase. Since Capture Drone only affected Elpizo Harpe, Archiereia won't have any problem in attacking.

Archiereia has her arms wide open, pieces of paper floating in front of her. Her hands then emit fire, and she spins, conjuring a flaming whirlpool beneath her, with wisps of fire circling her. Finally, her hand sends an arc of fire toward the Drone monster.

Unfortunately, before the arc of fire could reach the Drone monster, Blood Shepherd once again opened his other reverse card.

"That won't be enough! Trap Card: Assist Counter! When a Drone monster I control is targeted of an attack by a Link Monster with 1000 or higher ATK, I can discard one card from my Deck to destroy that monster instead and then summon 1 Drone Counter!" As the bounty hunter declared, he discarded a card from his Deck to the Graveyard, causing the arc of fire to turn back to Efcharis Archiereia like a boomerang.

"What?!" Holysaber didn't expect this move. He watched helplessly as Archiereia was burned down by her own flame, disappearing from the Field. One Drone Counter then appeared on Black Shepherd's field in Defense Position.

"I end my turn." Holysaber reluctantly ended his turn.

Blood Shepherd observed his opponent. Based on the brief conversation he had with Playmaker and the Ignis, Holysaber had not been acquainted with Playmaker until just a while ago, but he had met the Ignis prior. His possession of the rumored DIVINE-Attribute monsters and Cyberse-Type at that most likely related to his reason in helping Playmaker and his Ignis. No normal person could get DIVINE-Attribute Cyberse Type monsters and combined from the facts he has gathered so far; this Duelist has some sort of connection to the Ignis.

Even if he couldn't get Playmaker, capturing this guy would still give him benefit. He can get intel about the Ignis from him, and SOL Technologies no doubt is interested in the supposedly non-existent DIVINE-Attribute cards. Intel about the Ignis plus DIVINE-Attribute Cybserse-Type cards, it's like killing two birds with one stone. Besides, Holysaber was the reason why he couldn't get Playmaker, so it's only fair for Holysaber to compensate him for that.

Blood Shepherd will make sure he won't let his new prey get away.

"My Turn! Come out! The circuit that leads to victory! Arrowhead confirmed! The summoning condition is one Drone!" Blood Shepherd placed Drone Pawn to the Bottom Link Arow.

"Link Summon! Appear, Link 1, Battledrone Sergeant!" Blood Shepherd summoned his first Link Monster in the Extra Monster Zone.

Battledrone Sergeant (MACHINE/WIND/LINK/ATK: 800/LNK: 1/LM: Bottom)

"I activate Capture Drone's effect! I can Special Summon Drone Token up to the number of Link Arrow of the monster targeted by this card's effect!" Since Elpizo Harpe has three Link Arrows, Blood Shepherd summoned three Drone Tokens.

"Arrowhead confirmed! The summoning conditions are at least two Drones! Circuits combined!" Blood Shepherd summoned the Arrowheard portal once more, placing his three Drone Tokens to Right, Bottom, and Left Link Markers.

"Link Summon! Appear, Link 3, Battledrone General!" Blood Shepherd summoned his second Link Monster to the zone pointed by Sergeant's Bottom-Link Arrow.

Battledrone General (MACHINE/WIND/LINK/ATK: 2400/LNK: 3/LM: Right, Bottom, Left)

"I activate Battledrone General's effect! Once per Turn, I can target 1 Drone monster in my Graveyard and Special Summon it to the the zone this card points to!" He revived Drone Pawn.

"From my hand, I activate Equip Spell: Drone Launcher Unit! I equip it to General!" Blood Shepherd equipped the spell to his Link 3 Link Monster.

"The monster equipped with Drone Launcher Unit isn't affected by your monster's effects and it'll inflict 100 damage to my opponent equal to the combined Link Arrows of all Link Monsters on Field!" There were 7 Link Arrows in total, so the total damage Holysaber will take is 700.

Battledrone General turns to Holysaber and the armor equipped to it shot two beams that hit the Olympios Stratos user.

Holysaber LP: 4000 = 3300

"I set a card." Blood Shepherd set one card before looking at his Field. His army's formation has been completed.

"I activate the other effect of General! Once per Turn, I can target a Level 4 or lower Drone monster with ATK 1000 or less that I control and allow it to attack directly!" Blood Shepherd targeted Drone Pawn. Following his instruction, Drone Pawn repeatedly shoots Holysaber, reducing his LP further.

Holysaber LP: 3300 = 2700

"As a Drone monster inflicted Battle Damage by attacking directly, I activate Battledrone General's additional! By Releasing that monster, I can inflict damage equal to its ATK!" Blood Shepherd Released Drone Pawn, changing it into an energy beam that once again hits Holysaber.

Holysaber LP: 2700 = 2100

"As a Drone Monster inflicted Battle Damage by attacking directly, I Sergeant can attack directly!" Blood Shepherd declared his second attack. Sergeant shoots two missiles that Holysaber couldn't avoid.

Holysaber LP: 2100 = 1300

"As Sergeant inflicted Battle Damage by attacking directly, I can once again activate General's effect to Release it and inflict damage equal to its ATK!" Blood Shepherd Released Sergeant like he did with Pawn, changing it into a green beam that hit Holysaber, reducing his LP to red.

Holysaber LP: 1300 = 500

Holysaber grit his teeth. Blood Shepherd was beyond his expectation. Holysaber had expected Blood Shepherd to be strong, but not to this extent. In one turn, he instantly wiped most of his LP. He truly lived up to the name of the best bounty hunter in LINK VRAINS. If General attacks Elpizo Harpe, since the difference between the two Link Monsters' ATKs are only 100, Holysaber can still survive this turn with 400 LP.

However, knowing Blood Shepherd, he doubted that the bounty hunter would let him get away with that slim LP.

"I attack Elpizo Harpe with Battledrone General!" Blood Shepherd declared an attack with his remaining Link Monster. General is more than ready to make a shot.

"I activate Quick-Play Spell: Drone Force! Until the end of Battle Phase, the attacking Drone monster will have its ATK doubled!" Blood Shepherd activated the card from his hand, increasing General's ATK by another 2400.

Battledrone General ATK: 2400 = 4800

" *Thought so!"* Holysaber sweat dropped at the huge increase in the ATK. If this attack hit him, he'll lose. He musn't let that happen.

"I activate Diakonos' effect! I banish it from Graveyard to negate the activation of your Spell Card and destroy it and then draw 1 card!" Holysaber banished Diakonos from his Graveyard, effectively destroying the Quick-Play Spell that Blood Shepherd just used to double his Link Monster's ATK, reverting its ATK back to normal.

Battledrone General ATK: 4800 = 2400

"But the battle still continues! Go, Battledrone General!" Blood Shepherd declared, continuing his attack.

Battledrone General shot two beams from its own, destroying Elpizo Harpe and leaving Holysaber's Field empty.

Holysaber LP: 500 = 400

"I end my Turn. I'll give you credit for surviving this far. The Duelists I had dueled before never managed to survive those consecutive attacks." Blood Shepherd praised his opponent. It wasn't sarcasm or empty praise. He truly praised Holysaber's tenacity and quick thinking.

Holysaber felt his hands trembling again. As always. It's always like this when his LP is in the red. So close to defeat. The fear of losing is creeping into his mind, so fast in taking over him, reminding him of the pain he went through in that horrid place. And then, once the memory of pain is the only thing he could think of, the next thought coming into his mind is-

"Kuri!"

The small voice stopped Holysaber from stepping into that next step that would've urged him to open the door to the afterlife. He looked at his Duel Disk, but Saint Kuriboh was not there, popping out like it did yesterday. But he could hear its voice. It's coming from his cards.

"Kuri! Kuri!"

It wasn't his imagination. Saint Kuriboh was calling for him. Like before, it was trying to convey something to him. He checked his situation. He has three cards in his hand and six cards in his Graveyard. Blood Shepherd has one set card and Battledrone General on his Field. He must summon a monster with higher ATK than Battledrone General, and one that preferably inflict huge damage to his opponent. But he hasn't gotten used to using and understanding this Deck. To summon a monster that can help him in this situation is…

"Kuri." Saint Kuriboh winked at him. Holysaber blinked at the gesture of the small, cute monster calling for him. Then, he heard it. A strong pulse from his Deck. It was the same as when he first summoned Elpizo Harpe. The monsters were trying to help him.

"Then I'll have to trust them…" Holysaber murmured, smiling gratefully at Saint Kuriboh.

"My Turn! Draw!" Holysaber drew a monster card. Exactly the monster he needs. With this, the preparation is complete.

"With Scale 2 Olympios Stratos - Kastora and Scale 7 Olympios Stratos - Polydefki, I set the Pendulum Scale! This allows me to simultaneously summon Level 3 to 6 monsters!" Holysaber set his Pendulum Scale. Two monsters, Kastora and Polydefki appeared on both of Holysaber's sides, forming a gear-shaped gateway above.

Both monsters have the form of a male holding spears and wears heavy silver armor with a short, cream-colored surcoat worn over it. A vertical golden stripe covers the front of the surcoat, and their cape is split into two large, wing-like pieces. A large piece of metal, once more resembling a wing, protrudes from their right shoulder. The only difference between them is that Kastora has green cape while Polydefki has yellow cape.

Olympios Stratos - Kastora (CYBERSE/DIVINE/PENDULUM/EFFECT/ATK: 1500/DEF: 2000/LV: 5/PS: 2)

Olympios Stratos - Polydefki (CYBERSE/DIVINE/PENDULUM/EFFECT/ATK: 1500/DEF: 2000/LV: 5/PS: 7)

"Pendulum Summon! Come forth, my monsters!" From the gateway, two monsters emerged. First was Saint Kuriboh. Second was Olympios Stratos - Iatros, a monster with appearance of frail-looking female with porcelain-white skin, dark brown eyes, and short brown hair, ornamented with three orbs that vary from turquoise to deep blue. Her attire consisted of a white ruffled dress, long white stockings, and red slippers with decorative bows. A gold material is fastened at the waist of her dress, and a long red ribbon is tied in a bow at her back, trailing into long strands.

Saint Kuriboh (CYBERSE/DIVINE/EFFECT/ATK: 300/DEF: 200/LV: 1)

Olympios Stratos - Iatros (CYBERSE/DIVINE/EFFECT/ATK: 1000/DEF: 700/LV: 4)

"Pendulum Summon?!" Blood Shepherd looked in surprise. Pendulum cards are not uncommon, but due to how restrictive the current Duel rules are, there are only a few people who are using Pendulum cards, even more so for Speed Duel.

"Appear! The circuit that lights the future!" Holysaber called forth the Arrowhead for the third time.

"Arrowhead confirmed. The summoning condition is two DIVINE monsters. I set Saint Kuriboh and Iatros on the Link Markers! Circuits combined!" He set Saint Kuriboh on the Bottom Link Marker and Iatros on the Left Link Marker.

"Link Summon! Appear, Link 2, Olympios Stratos - Foteino Eleos!" Holysaber summoned a monster in the form of a male who dons a grey, full-body suit bearing a cross-like design on its torso, a stylization that continues down his arms and left leg. He wields two swords, one long and one short. He also wears a white helmet with wings-like protrusions on each side. He also wears a purple cape that compliments the subtle accent of his attire.

Olympios Stratos - Foteino Eleos (CYBERSE/DIVINE/LINK/ATK: 1400/LNK: 2/LM: Left, Bottom)

" *I see. He used Pendulum Summon to summon two monsters at the same time so he could use them to Link Summon."* Blood Shepherd understood. By simultaneously summoning two monsters at once, Holysaber wouldn't need to use a monster effect that allows him to Special Summon other monsters or wait for his next turn. However, this came at the cost of having two of his Magic and Trap Zone being occupied by the Pendulum Cards.

"I activate Mathitis' effect! By banishing this card from the Graveyard, I can Special Summon 1 DIVINE Link Monster from my Graveyard!" Holysaber revived Elpizo Harpe into his Main Monster Zone right below Foteino Eleos' bottom Link Arrow. He has Foteino Eleos to destroy Battledrone General and Elpizo Harpe to do the direct attack. His formation is complete.

"Battle! I attack Battledrone General with Foteino Eleos!" Holysaber declared his Battle Phase.

"Foteino Eleos' effect! When this card is co-linked, the ATK is doubled!" Holysaber revealed.

Olympios Stratos - Foteino Eleos ATK: 1400 = 2800

"Trap Card: Demolition Drone! By Releasing a Drone monster, I can halve all Battle Damage that I take this Turn!" Blood Shepherd tributed Drone Counter, halving the damage from Foteino Eleos' attack.

Foteino Eleos unleashed light blue blasts from the swings of his swords that destroyed the Drone Link Monster, leaving Blood Shepherd's Monster Zones empty.

Blood Shepherd LP: 4000 = 3600

"Next, I attack directly with Elpizo Harpe!" Holysaber readied for his second and final attack. Elpizo Harpe has already gripped his sword tight and is preparing to make a swing.

"At this moment I activate Elpizo Harpe's effect! When this card points to a monster, it gains an ATK equal to the difference between that monster's ATK and my current LP!" Elpizo Harpe's Top Link Arrow pointed to Foteino Eleos, who's current ATK was at 2800 and Holysaber's LP was at 400, making it a 2400 points difference.

Elpizo Harpe ATK: 2300 = 4700

"Katharos Slash!"

Elpizo Harpe slashed down its sword at Blood Shepherd, making a slash scar of data on Blood Shepherd's body as the bounty hunter wince in pain. The attack was supposed to inflict 4700 damage to Blood Shepherd and reduce his LP to 0, but due to Demolition Drone's effect, the damage Blood Shepherd suffered was halved, making the damage inflicted only 2350 points.

Blood Shepherd LP: 3600 = 1250

"Too bad. That damage wasn't enough to wipe out my Life." Blood Shepherd told his opponent. He still has enough LP. He'll end everything on his next turn. Or at least, that was his initial plan.

"No, it didn't. But the next damage would." Holysaber smiled confidently at the bounty hunter.

"I activate Elpizo Harpe's second effect! When this card inflicts battle damage, I can inflict additional damage to my opponent equal to the ATK of a monster pointed by Elpizo Harpe!" Holysaber revealed.

"What?!"

Due to Foteino Eleos' effect, his current ATK was 2800. Since Demolition Drone's effect only applies to Battle Damage, Effect Damage won't be affected by the Trap Card's effect, meaning the damage won't be halved.

"This is the end! Katharsi Stream!"

Elpizo Harpe held his sword with both hands and then pointed it toward Blood Shepherd. The sword was enveloped in a silverish white light and shoots forward, forming into the shape of bird that seemingly devouring the bounty hunter, depleting his remaining LP.

Blood Sheperd LP: 1250 = 0

Blood Shepherd fell from his D-Board. Sensing the danger, his Duel Disk automatically logged him out. Holysaber was relieved to see the moment Blood Shepherd disappeared from his sight. For now, nobody would chase after him and Playmaker.

"That was close." Holysaber sighed.

With the Duel settled, Holysaber went to where Playmaker was. Upon his arrival, a warning of forbidden area appeared. The yellow guy was nowhere to be seen. Instead, there was a Duelist with turquoise hair and red bangs. He wore a grey jumpsuit patterned with orange flames licking the limbs, red rib sections, and a yellow arrowhead shape running down his chest with a triangular aquamarine gem in the center. He has red shoulder-pads, greaves, and a gauntlet on his left hand and an elbow-guard on his right arm, which is bare to the wrist. He also wears red boots with grey, orange-lined tongues and orange soles. The Duelist appears to be speaking with Playmaker before logging out. Holysaber landed down, approaching the person he has intended to speak to.

"I take it you failed to apprehend him?" Holysaber asked, referring to the Duelist whom Playmaker was chasing after.

"Unfortunately. They passed through the forbidden area." Playmaker said calmly, but Holysaber could tell that he was disappointed in himself for his failure.

"This is my mail address. Contact me when you're ready to talk." Holysaber sent his address through his Duel Disk to Playmaker's. As much as he wanted to talk with Playmaker now, it won't be good for them to stay when they have inadvertently touched the forbidden area of LINK VRAINS. Better to retreat and talk later.

Holysaber finger reached to press the log out option, but he paused to face Playmaker again.

"I'd like to know about the Lost Incident." Holysaber told him. Judging from the utter shock on Playmaker's expression, looks like the Dark

Ignis and the unknown assailant were telling the truth that Playmaker was involved in the kidnapping incident ten years ago.

"I'll be waiting." The Olympios Stratos user didn't wait for Playmaker's reply and logged out immediately, leaving Playmaker by himself.

Playmaker looked on at the spot where the two Duelists who helped him have disappeared. They suddenly appeared and willingly helped him. He has many questions about them. He hoped he doesn't need to wait for long until their next meeting.

"Holysaber… Soulburner… Who are they?"

NEXT CHAPTER

Chapter 3 - Dragon Princess - Ryuki: Kento meets up with Playmaker and his group, and finally learned about the Lost Incident. Seeing Kento confused whether he should confront his past or not, Kazue issues a challenge to Playmaker's group to determine if they are trustworthy.

ORIGINAL CARDS

Holysaber's cards

Olympios Stratos - Elpizo Harpe (CYBERSE/DIVINE/LINK/ATK: 2300/LNK: 3/LM: Right, Top, Bottom-Right) - When this card points to a monster, it gains an ATK equal to the difference between that monster's ATK and your current LP. After this card inflicts battle damage, you can inflict damage to your opponent equal to the ATK of a monster pointed by this card's Link Arrow. If there are multiple monsters pointed by the Arrow, you may choose one of monster's ATK as damage.

Olympios Stratos - Kalimavkion (CYBERSE/DIVINE/EFFECT/ATK: 500/DEF: 100/LV: 3) - This card is treated as two materials for any Special Summon.

Olympios Stratos - Iatros (CYBERSE/DIVINE/EFFECT/ATK: 1000/DEF: 700/LV: 4) - Once per turn, when this card is Pendulum Summoned from your hand, you can add 1 Pendulum Monster with Scale 4 or lower from your Deck to your hand.

Olympios Stratos - Diakonos (CYBERSE/DIVINE/EFFECT/ATK: 900/DEF: 1000/LV: 3) - When your opponent activates a Trap or Spell card during Battle Phase while this card is in the Graveyard, you can banish this card to negate the activation of that card.

Olympios Stratos - Mathitis (CYBERSE/DIVINE/EFFECT/ATK: 1300/DEF: 0/LV: 4) - If this card is in the Graveyard, you can banish it to Special Summon a DIVINE-Attribute Link Monster in the Graveyard.

Olympios Stratos - Efcharis Archiereia (CYBERSE/DIVINE/LINK/ATK: 2000/LNK: 2/LM: Bottom-Right, Bottom-Left) - If this card is used as a material for Link Summon, the summoned Link Monster can attack twice.

Olympios Stratos - Kastora (CYBERSE/DIVINE/PENDULUM/EFFECT/ATK: 1500/DEF: 2000/LV: 5/PS: 2) - Effects to be added later.

Olympios Stratos - Polydefki (CYBERSE/DIVINE/PENDULUM/EFFECT/ATK: 1500/DEF: 2000/LV: 5/PS: 7) - Effects to be added later.

Olympios Stratos - Foteino Eleos (CYBERSE/DIVINE/LINK/ATK: 1400/LNK: 2/LM: Left, Bottom) - When this card is co-linked, its ATK is doubled.

Blood Shepherd's cards

Assist Counter (Trap) - When a Drone monster you control is targeted for an attack by a Link Monster with 1000 or higher ATK, you can discard one card from your Deck to destroy that monster instead and then summon 1 Drone Counter.

Drone Force (Quick-Play Spell) - You can activate this card during Battle Phase. Until the end of Battle Phase, the attacking Drone monster will have its ATK doubled.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I tried my best. I hope I didn't make a mistake in writing the Duel. Apologies if there's still a mistake. I wish I had someone to proof-read the Duels I wrote, but so far, I haven't found someone who is willing.

I decided to add Pendulum cards for Kento because Pendulum mechanic was not included in VRAINS. And despite the rule restricting Pendulum Summon's capability, I still have fondness for Pendulum Summon, so this won't be the last time you see Pendulum Summons.

And you might be wondering why Holysaber didn't use his Skill in this Speed Duel, that's because I want to save the Skill for the next Speed Duel that will happen in chapter 6. I already came up with what kind of Skill he'll have. Please be patient.

The next chapter would have more focus on Kazue/Ryuki.

Please do not forget to review this chapter. Your review is my motivation!

TRIVIA

- Translation of this chapter's Olympios Stratos monsters' names and attacks:

1. Kalimavkion: Based on a clerical headdress worn by Orthodox Christian and Eastern Catholic monks or awarded to clergy in Greek.

2. Diakonos: Deacon.

3. Mathitis: Disciple.

4. Efcharis Archiereia: Graceful High Priestess. Efcharis means "graceful", and Archiereia means "high priestess".

5. Kastoras: Based on the mythological Castor, Kastoras is how Castor's name is written and read in Greek.

6. Polydefki: Based on the mythological Pollux or Polydeuces, Polydefki is how the name is written and read in Greek.

7. Foteino Eleos: Foteino means "bright" or "luminous", Eleos means "mercy".

8. Katharos: Clean, pure.

9. Katharsi: Purification.

Dragon Princess - Ryuki

RESPONSE TO REVIEWS:

Big thanks ***tsukikami02, HunterHQ, Guest, Hell Kaiser Younes, Ulrich362, T.V. 2000*** to for reviewing the previous chapter!

HunterHQ & Guest: Since answering may spoil some things, I'm sorry to say that I cannot answer your question.

Hell Kaiser Younes: Aoi will have more importance later in the story, you'll have to be patient though. Windy is still reprogrammed by Lightning.

I hope you'll enjoy reading this chapter.

Chapter 3

Dragon Princess - Ryuki

Ryū no Himegimi " Ryūki"

Hospital - Den City - 10 Years Ago

Kazue stepped inside a hospital room. She sneaked in while her parents were talking with another couple right outside the room. She looked at Kento who was lying on a bed next to the window with oxygen concentrator attached to him, providing necessary oxygen to the little boy who was sleeping soundly. Kazue took a seat on the chair next to the bed. Her left hand held the sleeping boy's left hand while her right hand gently caressed the boy's unkempt hair.

It had been a week since he was rescued. After six long months, she finally could see Kento again. She was beyond happy when she heard they had found all the missing children. According to the doctor, when Kento was found, he suffered from malnutrition and fibrillation, but his condition was stabilized once he received treatment. However, he hasn't woken up since then even though physically he's getting better. The doctor deduced his coma was attributed to his mental condition. Traumatic experiences may cause people to go into a deep sleep.

Every single day, she always came to visit him, sitting at his bedside while holding his hand until the time was up. She was always reluctant to let go of his hand, afraid that he'd be taken away again. She always held his hand while praying with all her might that he'll open his eyes. She promised that once he wakes up and is discharged from hospital, she'll take him to play whatever he wants.

Then, it was as if her prayer had finally been answered.

She felt the fingers of the hand she was holding twitching weakly. Slowly then, the hand she was holding held her hand back.

"Tsurugi?" Kazue called her friend by his nickname, gaze shifted from his hand to his face.

She began to tear up when the closed eyes slowly opened and looked at her.

"Ka… zue…?" He spoke with a weak voice. Judging from his unfocused gaze, he was still drifting between consciousness and slumber.

"Yes! It's me, Tsurugi! Wait, I'll go call Auntie and Uncle! A-and the doctors too!" Kazue was about to let go of his hand and ran out of the room, but Kento's hand tightened, stopping her.

"No… I gotta go…" He suddenly said, closing his eyes tight again.

"Go? Go where?" Kazue walked closer to Kento again, now holding his hand with both of her hands. Looking at him again, she could tell he was still not fully awake.

"Mom and Dad…"

Kazue felt something crack in her chest when she heard what he said. She didn't even realize that her hold on his hand tightened all the while trembling. His parents were already dead. Why was he calling for them? She wondered that. No, she knew what he was about to say. She just didn't want to admit it. She didn't want to hear it.

"Mom and Dad are waiting for me… I want to be with them…"

Living Room - Hibiki Residence - Den City - Present Time

Kazue was watching TV with her brother when the news about Playmaker's return and Holysaber's appearance using the rumored DIVINE-Attribute cards suddenly interrupted the program she was watching with her brother. She was taken aback by the news. She and Kento were wondering how to get into contact with Playmaker, and here he was, appearing in LINK VRAINS again after three months.

What surprised her most, however, was that Holysaber also appeared right after Playmaker. She already told him to tell her first before meeting with Playmaker if they ever found a lead about his whereabout. And yet, he logged int and chased after Playmaker without informing her first. She doubted that he had any plan in mind since Playmaker only appeared moments before him. He must be in a hurry to log in after hearing the news about Playmaker's return.

"Big Sis, are you okay? You're frowning." Minoru asked worriedly.

"Oh, sorry, Minoru. I'm fine." Kazue patted her brother's head to assure him.

"By the way, when will Big Bro come here? He's coming here today, right?" Minoru asked.

"He's a bit busy right now, but he'll come here as soon as he can. Be a good boy and wait for him patiently, okay?" Kazue smiled at her brother, who nodded repeatedly and sat back to watch TV again.

Kazue watched the news in concern. Kento had made himself a center of attention with his DIVINE-Attribute deck. The media would make a fuss about him and Playmaker. At this moment, it must have already been filled with news and discussion about them. She knew it wouldn't help much, but once this was over, she'd delete any footage and pics about Holysaber spreading online. Kento would delete his history log too once he logged out.

" *Kento, you better return here soon…"*

Cafe Nagi - Central Plaza - Den City

After he logged out from LINK VRAINS, Yusaku immediately checked on Ai who got affected by an anti-Ignis program planted by Haru, a boy who is allied with Bohman, the Duelist who stole the consciousness of Kusanagi's younger brother, Jin Kusanagi. By the time he returned to the real world, Kusanagi was already there, trying to find the culprit who attacked his brother who was just beginning to recover. Yusaku felt guilty for his failure, but Kusanagi didn't blame him and told him to focus on restoring Ai instead.

The anti-Ignis program implanted by Haru was undeniably harmful but not deadly. It could only incapacitate Ai temporarily. Even if he left it alone, Ai would be able to restore himself eventually. However, Yusaku has no intention of waiting. The program was only meant to incapacitate temporarily, so removing it is not a difficult task for someone of his skill.

"It's probably this." Yusaku pressed the finishing touch. A spark came out from his Duel Disk before Ai emerged from it.

"Where am I? Who I am?" Ai said while looking around him. Hearing Ai's usual act, Yusaku smiled.

"You're finally back." Though he didn't show it, Yusaku was relieved to see the Dark Ignis no longer whining in pain.

"Oh yeah. I ate a bad program." Ai felt disgusted as he remembered the program he ate. To put it into words, it made his mouth feel dry and pinched, his stomach flared up like something literally burning from inside him. Whoever made the program knew well about Ignis's programming.

"You're a glutton." Yusaku commented. Thinking back, whenever Ai took someone else's program, it always required him to change into that monstrous form and ate the data. He doesn't know the details of how it works, only that absorbing and processing data is equal to consumption like the way human eats food, or so that's how it seems to be.

"Kusanagi! You're back?!" Ai ignored Yusaku's jab at him when he noticed Kusanagi sitting next to him, also busy with his computer.

"Yeah. Nothing I can do from there. I came here to find the culprit." Kusanagi is in a state of distress. Just when his brother made progress in his recovery, someone attacked him, putting him into a deep sleep. And while that happened, he couldn't do a thing to help his brother. Because his consciousness data was stolen, Jin who is lying on the hospital bed is no different from an empty shell. Waiting next to him won't wake him up. If he wants his brother to return to him, he must act.

Ai was given the summary of the situation about Kusanagi's little brother. It was honestly shocking. Never had he heard it was possible for someone's consciousness to be digitized directly from his physical body.

"But to digitize and steal a person's consciousness… That's far more impressive than Hanoi's computer virus." Ai recalled those times

when they fought Hanoi three months ago. The Knights of Hanoi were skilled hackers, but even with their skills, their capabilities only extended to corrupting a person's consciousness that prevented them from logging out. In Jin's case, his consciousness was literally taken away from his body.

"That's right! The new enemy is formidable." Kusanagi slammed his fist to the table, barely restraining his frustration. Knights of Hanoi was already forbidding enough, now they must deal with even more formidable opponents. Why did they steal Jin's consciousness? For what purpose? What if they did something to Jin's consciousness? Kusanagi didn't even want to imagine the worst happening to his brother.

Yusaku could see clearly what was going through Kusanagi's mind. Seeing Kusanagi like this, Yusaku felt even more frustrated by his failure. He was so close on catching up to the kidnappers with the help of two people who took on opponents who were getting on his way, even then, they still managed to get away. Kusanagi looked so happy when he told him that Jin was starting to show signs of recovery, only for this to happen. Kusanagi had been waiting for ten years for this sign of recovery. He won't let Kusanagi and Jin suffer any longer. That's why he must save Jin as soon as possible.

"I promise to find him and retrieve your brother's consciousness!" Yusaku stood up as he declared so. Kusanagi had been helping him all this time. Now, it's time for him to help his partner.

"Thanks, Yusaku." Kusanagi said in gratitude. He knew he could always trust Yusaku.

"Sorry for changing the subject, but what happened to Holysaber?" Ai raised his hand, finally bringing up one of the things that he is curious about the most. He was out cold after eating that disgusting program. Kusanagi also arrived later, so the name was unfamiliar to him.

Yusaku started explaining what happened from the beginning. When Blood Shepherd appeared to challenge him, a Duelist named Holysaber appeared and challenged Blood Shepherd in his stead. Similarly, after Yusaku defeated Bohman and chased after him, another Duelist named Soulburner appeared to take on Bit and Boot, Duelists also working together with Bohman. The rest was as they already knew, Bohman and Haru escaped to the supposed restricted area of LINK VRAINS, forcing him to log out.

"So, after Holysaber, there's another Duelist named Soulburner who helped you. Anything you know about him?" Ai asked.

"I don't know about Soulburner, but Holysaber left his mail address for me to contact him." Yusaku answered, showing the said mail address before turning to Ai again. "Ai, you know him, right? Who is he?"

"Well… to be honest, I don't know much about him. We just met two days ago in the Cyberse World." Ai scratched his head, recalling his first meeting with the Olympios Stratos user.

Ai explained how he arrived at the Cyberse World, only to find it already destroyed and his Ignis friends were nowhere to be seen. He only found Linkuriboh and Saint Kuriboh. It wasn't long after he found Saint Kuriboh that he met Holysaber and his friend, Ryuki. And immediately after they met, they were attacked by a mysterious Duelist, but Holysaber helped in driving him out. Ai didn't get to ask many questions to Holysaber because the Duelist logged out shortly after the Duel, and so did Ryuki. In the end, the only things he knew about Holysaber were assumptions based on what he heard and his observation of Holysaber's behavior.

"Yusaku, I think Holysaber is also a victim of the Lost Incident." Ai revealed, remembering what the mysterious attacker said and Holysaber's reaction.

"What?! Are you sure?!" Yusaku asked, Kusanagi also gasped in shock.

"Yeah. When the masked guy who attacked us mentioned about you were trapped in the same place as him, I asked Holysaber if he got kidnapped and forced to Duel when he was little. Judging from his reaction, he is also a victim." Ai was almost certain of it. His reaction, Saint Kuriboh's attachment to him, and his proficiency in using Olympios Stratos deck, all of them were too much to be a coincidence. He is related to the Lost Incident, or to be precise, to the Divine Ignis.

"That's why he said he wants to know about the Lost Incident." Yusaku muttered. It all made sense now. No wonder Holysaber knew about the Lost Incident and asked him to share information about the incident.

"I don't think he has moved on from the incident. He looked pale when I asked him about it…" Ai added. Holysaber's terrified face when he mentioned the incident was still fresh in Ai's mind. And that moment when Holysaber fell on his knees while holding his trembling body… that must be due to his trauma resurfacing.

Yusaku went silent hearing that. Yusaku recalled the time when he was still haunted by his past. Every time he slept, he always had nightmares of still being trapped inside that white room, being forced to Duel, and electrocuted when he lost. The nightmare chained him, as if trying to keep him trapped in darkness, forever reliving his suffering. Yusaku knew well how painful it was to live with that nightmare over and over again. If he can help in bringing Holysaber the closure he needs, then he'd willingly lend a helping hand.

"If he is like you and Jin, then he has the right to know about the Hanoi Project." Kusanagi was also thinking the same. Though he wasn't a victim himself, he knew from watching Jin and Yusaku that the incident left a huge scar in their heart.

"Let's contact him then! Tell him we'll meet up tomorrow! The sooner the better!" Ai was eagerly pointing at the mail address that hadn't been touched.

"I'll ask him to meet after school hours." Yusaku started typing the mail. All the kidnapping victims were children of the same age, so Holysaber should be the same age as him. Since he logged into LINK VRAINS and decided to learn about the Lost Incident, it doesn't seem Holysaber is in the same unresponsive state as Kusanagi's brother, he should be attending school.

Aside from Specter, this would be the second time he'll meet a victim of the Lost Incident. Unlike Specter who enjoyed those days during the incident, Holysaber was in the same predicament as he was. Holysaber's time has stopped since then.

As someone who shared the same pain and overcame it, Yusaku wishes to help his fellow victim to find the peace he needs.

Kazue's Room - Hibiki Residence

Kento was taking a sip of his tea that was served by Kazue. After he logged out, he went straight to Kazue's home, deleted his activity logs to ensure nobody could track him, and finally explained everything to her when she showed him a footage (which she quickly recorded for herself and then deleted the footage online) of his Duel against Blood Shepherd in LINK VRAINS that has been spreading on the internet like wildfire. People have been talking about him because of his use of DIVINE-Attribute Cyberse-Type cards. This was bound to happen sooner or later as Kento had already decided to become active, and Kazue knew that, but she preferred it if he consulted with her first before just jumping into action. But again, Kazue could understand why Kento decided to chase after Playmaker right at that moment.

"I'll cut you some slack for this once." Kazue finally said after Kento finished his story. At least he has contacted Playmaker, that's one objective achieved. Now, they just need to wait until Playmaker sends an e-mail to them.

"Are you okay? When dueling Blood Shepherd, I mean." Kazue saw how Holysaber was faring after Blood Shepherd destroyed Elpizo Harpe with Battledrone General. She could tell even from the screen that Holysaber almost had a panic attack at that moment if it weren't for Saint Kuriboh's help.

"I can't say I'm completely alright, but I don't feel bad either. Thanks to our little buddy here."

Kento's gaze turned to a white-colored ball that was as big as his palm. The white ball rolled closer to Kento and then jumped to his palm. The ball then revealed its face, having a pair of purple eyes. From the four small circular lines, two in the middle, and two below, four green limbs came out.

"Liking your new body, Saint Kuriboh?" Kento asked the Duel Monster who is now occupying a small robot.

"Kurikuri!" Saint Kuriboh cheered, jumping here and there inside the room.

"Looks like Saint Kuriboh is happy with the body you provided. Nice work as always." Kento said to Kazue.

"Never thought the prototype of pet robot I'm developing would be tested like this." Kazue was pleased with the result of her work.

For her own personal project, Kazue is in the middle of developing a pet robot aimed for young children. Due to the popularity of Duel Monsters, she decided to create a small robot based on a Duel Monster. Because of its simple yet cute appearance, she chose Sphere Kuriboh to be the model for her first pet robot. The machine was already finished and all that was left was to give it a simple AI program. Who would've imagined that instead of a simple AI program, a vagrant Duel Monster program instead was placed into the body. Taking consideration of Saint Kuriboh's appearance, she changed the color from brown to white to fit its design.

It wasn't her intention to have Saint Kuriboh occupy her robot. She placed Saint Kuriboh and the rest of Kento's deck inside his Duel Disk next to the newly finished robot while she was in the process of materializing the cards. When she realized it, Saint Kuriboh had already taken over the robot and moved around like it was its own body. Seeing how happy Saint Kuriboh was and the opportunity to observe how her robot is functioning, Kazue decided to let Saint Kuriboh use the robot as its body. She instructed Saint Kuriboh to return for a moment until she finished materializing its card and then placed the card inside the robot, allowing Saint Kuriboh to occupy it. So far, there has been no problem with the machine.

"Speaking about robot, you also have another robot with you, right?" Kento shifted his gaze to a small but bigger robot than Saint Kuriboh.

It was the robot that was sent to him along with the flash drive. He and Kazue had it checked, and they didn't find anything malicious. It was just an ordinary maid robot with an AI program programmed for gardening work. Rather than throwing it away, Kazue decided to fix the female robot and let her help with the garden of her residence.

"It is nice to meet you, Mistress' guest. I am Astra." The robot, now named Astra by Kazue, greeted Kento.

"Hello, Astra." Kento shook the robot's small hand.

"Are you sure I can keep her? She can help with your garden." Kazue asked. She had been thinking about wanting another robot maid specialized in gardening, but she could always ask her father to provide her with one or build it herself. Because Kento was the one who received her, she believed that Kento by all rights should be the one to keep her.

"No need. My aunt prefers to tend to her garden by herself. As you know, she is very meticulous." Kento declined. Having a robot maid would be useful, but when it comes to gardening, his aunt refuses to let anybody take care of her precious plants. The last time he made a mistake, his aunt gave him a long explanation that took up most of

his time. Since then, both learned that it'd be better for her to handle the garden herself while Kento would just assist her if she asks for him.

"Back to the topic, Kento, the next time you're going to meet Playmaker or possibly Dueling someone, please at least inform me first. I'll help you to the best of my ability." Kazue knew she might sound meddlesome, and that's something she'll accept as long as she can help Kento.

"I will. Thanks, Kazue." Kento smiled gratefully.

"With that settled, I'll go get Minoru. He has been waiting to play with you again." Kazue left the room to call her little brother. When Kento came, Minoru immediately asked to play, as usual. Again, Kento and she must convince him to wait for a while until they finished talking. Now that they were done, Minoru would be jumping with joy, finally allowed to play with his 'Big Bro'.

While waiting for Kazue and Minoru, Kento noticed a book fell from the shelf. Picking it up, it was an album. He opened it and a nostalgic smile was formed when he saw photos of him and Kazue as children. The date was eleven years ago, meaning he was 6 years old, and Kazue was 7 years old when these photos were taken. A year before the kidnapping.

Seeing the photos, a certain memory came to him.

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11 Years Ago

Kento was sitting on a swing at the park.

"Ken-chan!"

He twitched when he heard his name being called by the voice that he knew all too well. On the other side of the park, Kazue was standing there, waving her arm at him, but Kento looked away

angrily, his mouth pouting. Seeing the gesture, Kazue had to approach him.

"What's with that face?" Kazue asked.

"Stop calling me, Ken-chan already. I'm a boy! At least don't use 'chan' with me!" Kento protested, still pouting.

"Why does it matter? There's also another boy in my class that we called with suffix 'chan'." Kazue couldn't understand what was bothering him when he didn't say any objection whenever people called him by the nickname. And she knew some boys who were older than them being called with suffix 'chan' by others as sign of affection or fondness.

"But I don't like it! If you want to give me a nickname, give me a cool one!" Kento demanded, finally facing Kazue.

"You're so cute when you're pouting like that, you know." Kazue giggled as she saw his pouting cheeks were like chipmunks stuffing its mouth. The smoke coming out from his ears and nose only made him even more adorable.

"Big Sis… !" Kento whined in annoyance. He was glaring, but in Kazue's eyes, his glare did nothing to make her afraid. It was no different from seeing an angry puppy.

"Okay, okay, I'll come up with a different name then." Kazue would like to tease him more, but she felt that making him angrier would make the boy refuse to talk with her for a while and she'd like to avoid that.

Kazue hummed softly while thinking about a new nickname for her friend. He certainly wouldn't want a cute name, so she'll scratch names that sounds cute or girly. A nickname is given to the person based on their characteristics or something relating to them. Thinking of all the knowledge she has about Kento and his name, the name that would be fitting for him and cool would be…

"How about 'Tsurugi'?" Kazue suggested.

"Tsurugi?" Kento repeated questioningly.

"Yes. The first kanji on your name can be read as 'Tsurugi'. It's a double-edged sword." Kazue explained her reason for picking that name.

Kento contemplated the name. He didn't know about the kanji since they hadn't learned kanji yet. Kento must praise Kazue for already studying kanji on her own despite her age. He learned kendo, but he had never heard of the type of sword called tsurugi. He'll have to ask his uncle later. Aside from that, 'Tsurugi' sounds better than 'Ken-chan' at the very least.

"I like it." Kento nodded at the new nickname that Kazue came up with.

"Okay. From now on, I'll call you Tsurugi." Kazue's face beamed pleasantly as she began to call him by the new nickname.

Present Time

It was a sweet memory. One that he would never forget. Back then, he was happy to have a nickname with such a cool meaning. It also fits with how he was training kendo under his uncle's tutelage. However, ever since that incident five years ago, Kazue had stopped calling him by that name.

" *You have been reborn as a new person. You're not the same boy as you were before. That's why, from now on, I'll call you by your proper name."*

… was what Kazue told him when she decided to drop the nickname completely. He was a bit saddened that Kazue never called him 'Tsurugi' again, but he also felt that it was the right thing to do, so he never protested. And people who don't know him might mistake his

name if Kazue continued to call him by that nickname. Better to avoid that. Instead, he used his old nickname as a pseudonym for his side-job as a hacker.

PING

A notification sound came from Kazue's computer. A mail just came in the inbox of the mail address that he used for his covert work as a hacker. The sender was someone he had been expecting.

Playmaker.

That was earlier than he expected. He thought it'll take at least a whole day until Playmaker will finally give him a reply. Not that he minded. Reading the mail, Playmaker asked to meet up tomorrow in the previous LINK VRAINS server after school. If Playmaker was the victim of the incident ten years ago, he'd be the same age as him, a highschooler. Playmaker must've thought the same, that's why he decided to wait until school is over to meet up.

Kento typed his agreement to meet up at the specified time and place and then sent the reply. He leaned back on the chair, looking up at the ceiling.

Tomorrow. He'll finally get the answer about his past.

Highschool Section - Den Academy - Den City - The Next Day

Kento yawned as he arrived at school. He couldn't stop thinking about today's meeting with Playmaker that he lacked sleep. As the result, Kazue went ahead to school before him. She actually went earlier than usual because of her club matters. She said she wanted to go with him to meet Playmaker after school if she could finish her club business on time. Kento won't expect her to come though, since from her voice this morning, it didn't sound like the problem with her club was so simple. He'll still inform Kazue later when he logs into LINK VRAINS.

"Hey! Did you see the Duel yesterday?!"

"You mean Playmaker, right? He's finally back at LINK VRAINS."

"Yeah, but there's also Holysaber! You know, the Duelist who used DIVINE-Attribute Deck!"

"Right! I watched his Duel when I was in LINK VRAINS! He's amazing!"

"I know what you mean! Never thought he could use Pendulum Summon that way."

"His DIVINE-Attribute monsters also looks powerful."

"How did he get DIVINE-Attribute cards? Do you think we can get some too?"

"Maybe we can start looking and found some!"

Kento twitched as he strode into school. As expected, Holysaber became the topic for everyone to talk about. He truly had done it. He must be extra careful when logging into LINK VRAINS as Holysaber from now on. It was a good thing that he already posted a notice of temporarily not accepting any job offer as Tsurugi. If it weren't for that, his chatroom would've already been flooded with requests to investigate about Holysaber and DIVINE-Attribute cards by now.

"Excuse me."

Kento stopped when he heard a voice behind him. Turning around, he was facing a boy his age with fair skin, blue eyes, grayish white hair with red highlights. He was also wearing a pair of green-framed glasses. Other than the violet-colored necktie, his attire was the standard Den Academy uniform, so he must be a student of Den Academy. He never saw his face in his class, so Kento assumed that he was from a different class.

"May I help you?" Kento asked politely.

"I just transferred here and looking for the teacher's office." The bespectacled student said. He suddenly gasped as if realizing something and bowed politely to Kento. "My name is Takeru Homura. Starting today, I'll be attending this school."

"My name is Kento Hijiri. I also just transferred to this school a few days ago. Nice to meet you, Homura-kun." Kento extended his hand to the new student for a handshake.

"We're the same, then. Nice to meet you too, Hijiri-kun." Takeru accepted the handshake as they got acquainted with each other.

He still has some time before the first period begins, so Kento escorts the new student to the teacher's office. Going to the office made Kento remember Kazue mentioned about having to meet up with the teacher to talk about the club. Maybe he'll meet Kazue there. The teacher's office was right in their view when the door slid open and Aoi Zaizen came out from the room.

"Good morning, Zaizen-san." Kento greeted her.

"Good morning, Hijiri-san." She greeted him back.

"Have you seen Kazue? She should be here already." Kento asked. Since she's the younger sister of SOL Technologies Security Chief, Kazue frequently delivered messages and the sort in her father's stead through Aoi to be given to her brother. He had seen her a few times speaking with Kazue, perhaps she knew where Kazue was.

"If it's Hibiki-senpai, just now she is-" Aoi pointed to the hallway to the right, but suddenly paused.

Following her gaze, Kento saw Kazue speaking with a male student. If Kento remembered it right, he helped Kazue carry some boxes to the clubroom when she was showing Kento the clubs around the school. She didn't seem to be close with the guy though. Right now, she was using her business face while speaking to him. If she's

using that face to someone who is not associates of Hibiki Enterprise, that could only mean one thing.

"Sorry, Homura-kun, please wait a moment." Kento walked his way to Kazue, ignoring questions from Aoi and Takeru.

Kazue was smiling politely. But on the inside, she's irritated. In the past and even now, many people have asked her to request her father for various things like the latest Duel Disk or robot models or recommending them to her father for a future job, and so on. She has consistently rejected them for many years to this day. Most of the time, she just told them off nicely.

"… I'm afraid that is not possible. Even if I'm the one who asked, my father won't give the latest model to just anybody. He is very strict, you see. He won't spoil me just because I'm his daughter." She told him. That was her telling people off nicely.

Any person with a brain should understand that she's drawing the line here. There was one time someone still insisted, and she was forced to resort to calling her father and had him himself to tell off the person who tried to take advantage of his beloved daughter to use her connection with him. She preferred not to have to call her father though. She didn't want to trouble him with something trivial when he was already busy enough.

"Ah, please, just one. Just think of it as paying the favor for helping you last time." The guy retorted. He was clearly not reading the underlying message there.

Kazue's smile started to crack at the guy's shamelessness. Who does this guy think he is? They're not even close, where did he get such audacity? Also, a favor? She never even asked for his help, he was the one who insisted in helping her. He snatched the box she was carrying without her permission.

"Just because you helped her over something trivial, she must pay you back by gifting you something expensive like a Duel Disk? That's

stupidly ridiculous if you ask me."

Kazue and the guy turned to the side and saw Kento standing there. He stood protectively in front of Kazue, glaring at the guy.

"Huh? This is none of your business. This is just between me and Hibiki!" Again, the guy couldn't read the air and still insisted on getting what he wanted.

"You only helped her carry some stuff. That's not something that needs to be repaid with a Duel Disk." Kento said the obvious. It was ridiculous to demand such a big reward when the so-called help he did for her was not even a big deal.

"Besides, it's already wrong that you helped her only to expect something in return. When you help others, good things will be bound to return to you. But that is only if you're sincere. If you're just going to take advantage of Kazue, then buzz off." Kento had met a lot of people who approached Kazue with pretentious kindness, trying to get on her good side in hope that they'll get a direct connection to her father. Thankfully, Kazue's father had expected this and taught her well to be able to tell the difference between people who are sincere and those who are not. Unfortunately, there are still shameless people like this guy, and that's when Kento would decide to step in.

"What? Just because you're her childhood friend you think you can just meddle in our business? You said that, but I bet you used your connection with her to get as many advanced Duel Disk and robots as you want. Must be nice to be her childhood friend." The guy sneered, not knowing he had stepped on the landmine.

The next thing the guy knew, he felt a stinging pain in his left cheek. Kazue, who was supposed to be standing behind Kento was now in front of him with her hand raised. Gone was her polite smile, now replaced by a furious glare. Kento took a step aside, knowing there was no stopping her once her button had been pushed.

"I've been patient and listening to your nonsense, but you've crossed the line. If Kento is like you said he is, then he wouldn't be wearing that old model Duel Disk on his wrist right now." Kazue pointed at the Duel Disk Kento was wearing. She really hated it when it came to this. Whenever people failed to impress her, they tried to degrade Kento, trying to convince her with stupid lies like he was just taking advantage of their friendship and whatnot. Those people must've thought of her as an idiot to think she'd believe the nonsense they were spouting. She'd be willing to resolve this problem peacefully, but if they went as far as dragging Kento into this, she saw no reason to hold back.

"You have two choices: stop bothering me with your demands and leave quietly or I'll inform my father you're harassing me, and he'll inform all the shops with our products to never sell anything to you. Which will it be?" She was just bluffing, of course, but she knew well that a guy like this doesn't have the brain to see through her bluff. Besides, her father does have the authority to issue such order, only that he would never go that far even if she was the one who asked him, he'll suggest her to try other option.

As the guy didn't say anything, being too intimidated by her threat, Kazue took that as him finally getting the message across and instantly back to her polite smile.

"I believe our business is done here. Let's go, Kento." Kazue didn't bother to look back at the guy, pulling Kento with her to the front of the teacher's office where Aoi and Takeru were still standing.

"Hibiki-senpai, are you okay?" Aoi asked worriedly. She already had a bad feeling when the guy suddenly called for her, but her senpai told her that she could handle this herself.

"As you can see, I am okay, thanks to Kento." Kazue assured her underclassman.

"Nah. That ultimatum of yours was what shut him up." Kento wished to help her, only for her to stand up for him.

"But only because you're there for me." Kazue retorted. She then noticed Takeru who was looking at them nervously. "Who is this? I don't think I've ever seen him around."

"This is Takeru Homura-kun. He just transferred today. I'm showing him the way to the teacher's office." Kento introduced the transfer student.

"N-nice to meet you." Homura greeted his new senpai.

"Sorry for leaving you like that, Homura-kun." Kento apologized. He couldn't blame the guy for being surprised to see such a spectacle on his first day at school. He could only hope they were not giving a bad impression to him.

"It's fine. If I were you, I would've done the same." Homura smiled in understanding. He got the gist of what happened based on their conversation. He was ready to step in if necessary, using excuses like asking for directions since he was a new student or such.

"Let's go in, Homura-kun. I'll see you again later, Kazue, Zaizen-san." Kento urged the new student to go inside the office, leaving Kazue and Aoi outside.

Kazue sighed. It was still early in the morning, and she was already tired. She already had her hands full with her club problem and then this happened. And then there's a matter with the meeting with Playmaker after school. Kento said he'll be fine going alone, but she still wanted to come and see for herself what kind of person Playmaker is personally, not the one she knew based on news and rumors.

"Senpai, are you still bothered by what happened?" Aoi asked concerned.

Kazue just realized that she got immersed in her thought that it must have shown on her face.

"Oh, sorry. I'm okay, really. I'm already used to this. Kento is also with me, so I'm not worried." Kazue wasn't lying. This wasn't the first time, and she knew she could always depdn on Kento to help her when needed.

"Hijiri-san must be a good friend to you, for you to went as far as threatening that guy." Aoi said. In her eyes, her senior was a kind, mature, and dignified person. She was always smiling and kind to everybody. She almost looked like an adult, in fact. That's why it was shock to see her get mad to the point of being threatening for the sake of defending her friend. For Hibiki-senpai who always kept her composure to threaten someone must mean she's beyond furious.

"Yes, he is. He is one of the few true friends that I ever have. I'll even say he is the person I trust most." Kazue smiled, thinking fondly of her childhood friend.

"That must be nice…" Aoi murmured while looking at the teacher's office, not even realizing that Kazue could hear her.

Kazue blinked as she saw Aoi's expression. She was smiling but it was a sad one. And the way she's looking at the door to the teacher's office, Kazue could see envy reflected in that gaze. Kazue understood then what her junior was thinking.

Ever since the first moment they met, Kazue felt a sense of kinship with Aoi. The two of them are kindred souls. Just like how she is often approached by people because of her father being the owner and CEO of Hibiki Enterprise, Aoi is also approached by people because of her brother working in SOL Technologies and having a high-ranking position at that. Being approached by people who only want to exploit them could lead to trust issues.

Kazue has Kento by her side, so she's faring better. Aoi, however, other than her brother, didn't appear to have a close friend she could lean on. Whenever she saw her junior at school, she was always alone. It's clear that she's keeping a distance from others. She couldn't help but be skeptical of those who approach her. They will

either ask for the newest Duel Disk model on the market, or even for connections to get a job at the company. Kazue could understand how frustrating it is.

"I'm sure you'll find one too, Zaizen-san. A true friend who'll see you and be there with you for who you are." Kazue told Aoi. She's not saying this as a consolation. She said so because she was certain that would happen. Her junior is a good girl at heart. Someone with a kind heart will attract another kind-hearted person.

Kazue smiled at Aoi again before leaving her dumbstruck junior. Aoi could only watch her senior walking away until she couldn't see her anymore. She held her hands together, her expression downcast as she thought about Kazue's words. Aoi realized Kazue must've seen through her envy. She thought she hid it well, but she obviously failed. Other than her brother, Aoi knew that Kazue is trustworthy. Because they are in a similar situation, she could relate to her senior.

Kazue herself had also shown that she had no hidden agenda whenever she was interacting with Aoi. Kazue always kept their conversation short, concise, and to the point. Her senior never forced her to engage in small talk, knowing her issue and kept herself from crossing the line that Aoi had made unless Aoi herself allowed her. Aoi appreciated her for that. Despite acknowledging Kazue to be trustworthy, however, Aoi still couldn't find the courage to open her heart to Kazue. Now, knowing her senior turned out to have a close friend she could count on, Aoi felt envious of her. Ever since she was little, she never had friends because she and her brother kept moving from one town to another due to his work.

Except one.

But in the end, she also must leave behind the one and only friend she had. They never met again since then, and other than her, Aoi hadn't met anybody whom she could trust enough to be her friend, especially after her brother worked for SOL Technologies. Ten years had passed, but she couldn't forget her. Kazue said she'll eventually

find someone she could trust and lean on, but she doubted that she'll find someone like her first friend.

"Miyu-chan…"

LINK VRAINS

In the end, Kazue couldn't come with him because she was still busy with her club problem. Holysaber didn't want to make Playmaker wait, so he went ahead to his house and logged in. He waited at the promised coordinate in LINK VRAINS, telling Kazue only through mail right before he logged into LINK VRAINS. He'll surely get an earful from her later for leaving her just like that.

It didn't take a few minutes of waiting until Playmaker arrived.

"Hello. Thank you for contacting me, Playmaker." Holysaber greeted him.

"I'm here too!" From Playmaker's Duel Disk, the A.I. from before came out.

Holysaber then noticed that Playmaker and his A.I. didn't come alone. There was another person accompanying him. Holysaber recognized him as the guy who was with Playmaker when the latter failed to apprehend the Duelist in yellow yesterday. This person logged out shortly after he caught up to them. From his Duel Disk, an A.I. with similar features to Playmaker's A.I. came out.

"I believe a proper introduction is necessary. Once again, my name is Holysaber. Nice to meet you." Holysaber reintroduced himself. Playmaker and Dark Ignis already knew him, but the other haven't. He's sure that Playmaker already told them about him, but it's only proper to introduce himself again when he haven't been acquainted with the other two.

"And I am Playmaker's A.I. partner, Ai-chan!" Playmaker's A.I. finally gave his name. Holysaber blinked at the simple name. Before, he was referred as 'Ignis', so Holysaber assumed that was his name. If not, then that means Ignis is not referring to his name as an individual. Well, he has no objection or problem with the unexpectedly cute and gentle-sounding name like Ai. Personally, he prefer Ai than Ignis as a name.

"Now that you mentioned it, you haven't given me your name back then. Hello again, Ai." Holysaber smiled briefly at the A.I. before turning to the other two people.

"I'm Soulburner and this is my A.I. partner, Flame." The Duelist in red introduced himself and his A.I. partner.

"My name is written with the kanji indomitable soul dream, pronounced Flame. Cool, isn't it?" Flame explained, crossing his arms and raised his chest proudly as he did so. Name written in kanji but having English pronunciation is rare but a forced reading is not uncommon thing in Japan.

"Again? Do you really need to explain your name to everyone we met?" Soulburner gave his partner a look in response to his introduction. Judging from Flame's behavior and Soulburner's reaction, the AI explaining his name is a common occurrence.

"Nice to meet you too, Soulburner and Flame." Holysaber greeted them. If his intuition was right, they'll start bickering if he didn't interfere. He decided to quickly shift the subject. "Blood Shepherd called you Ignis yesterday, so I thought Ignis was your name. But since you just told me your names, I take it that 'Ignis' refers to the type of A.I. like yours?"

"Correct. You're quick to notice that detail." Flame looked impressed. Most people didn't bother with such detail until they know the importance of the Ignist to both Knights of Hanoi and SOL Technologies.

"We heard that you are a victim of Lost Incident like us. Is this true?" Soulburner asked the question they've been meaning to ask now that they have gathered. He and Flame only knew Playmaker's identity as another victim of the incident and Ai is the AI based on him. They didn't expect that they'd meet one more victim of the incident.

"'Like us?' Does that mean you were also kidnapped and forced to Duel in that white room ten years ago?" Holysaber faced Soulbuner in shock when Soulburner and Playmaker nodded in confirmation. Not only Playmaker, but Soulburner is also a victim? That's why he came with Playmaker to meet him.

"Please tell me. What exactly is this Lost Incident?" Holysaber asked. He had been dying to know about the incident that ruined his life for ten years.

"We will get into that. But first, we'd like to know how you ended up in the Cyberse World two days ago." Playmaker replied.

Hearing Playmaker, Holysaber straightened himself up. He was the one who approached them first and asked them to meet up. It's only fair for him to be the first to share his story.

"Of course. I was planning to exchange information with you." Holysaber then started to tell his story. From how he received a mysterious package from an unknown sender to how he met Ai, Linkuriboh, and Saint Kuriboh in Cyberse World and helped them driving out a mysterious attacker.

"In short, you received an anonymous package containing your current avatar and the coordinate of the Cyberse World. You went to Cyberse World because you thought the sender of the package is waiting for you there." Ai summarized Holysaber's whole story, which Holysaber affirmed with a nod.

"The person behind that masked Duelist knew about you and the Cyberse World. He even sent that package after the Cyberse World

was destroyed. The timing is too much to be a coincidence. The person behind that masked Duelist most likely is involved with the attack on the Cyberse World." Flame deduced.

When Flame first heard about the masked Duelist from Ai, he only half-suspected the masked Duelist had some sort of relationship with the culprit because the masked Duelist was not present when the Cyberse World was attacked. Only a few people knew about the existence of the Cyberse World. They are Knights of Hanoi, SOL Technologies, and the Ignis themselves. He thought that it's a possibility the masked Duelist Ai told him was a Duelist hired by SOL Technologies to capture the Ignis. However, that possibility was now scrapped. If the masked Duelist was connected to SOL Technologies, they wouldn't contact Holysaber and instruct him to work together with Playmaker, even pitting him against Blood Shepherd whom they hired. That leaves the suspicion that the masked Duelist is related to the culprit of his home world's destruction as the only possibility.

"On that topic, can you explain it to me now? About the Lost Incident, Cyberse World, and Ignis?" Holysaber asked. He already answered their question, now it's his turn to get some answers from them.

Playmaker decided to do the explaining. Playmaker started from the Lost Incident, also known as the Hanoi Project. How the Knights of Hanoi kidnapped seven children to create Ignis, seven A.I.s with free wills each based on the kidnapped children. However, the Hanoi then deemed Ignis as a threat to humanity based on the simulations they did, leading to the Knights of Hanoi nearly destroying the network three months ago in their attempt to destroy the Ignis.

All the while listening to Playmaker's story, Holysaber couldn't hide his surprise. He had a few speculations about the reason behind his kidnapping, but never in his wildest imagination that it would be for something like what you would see in sci-fic films. Normally, this is something that you'd just brush off as bullshit, but two of the Ignis are right in front of him and he could tell from their behaviors that they were not like ordinary A.I.s. There's no way a program without

free will would be capable of behaving like people do. Ai and Flame are the living proofs that supported Playmaker's story.

"I think you are based on the Divine Ignis." Ai said. When Holysaber turned to him as if asking what made him so sure, the Dark Ignis continued, "Saint Kuriboh is shy and reclusive to other people except a few. But Saint Kuriboh immediately grew attached to you the moment you two met. He must've been able to sense you are connected to its master."

"There's also the fact that you show strong affinity with Olympios Stratos deck even though it hasn't been that long since you gained that deck." Flame added.

Holysaber remembered the dream he had about Ai and the Divine Ignis yesterday. After listening to the whole story, he couldn't dismiss it as a simple dream anymore. Does that dream have something to do with him being the Origin of the Divine Ignis?

"Where is this Divine Ignis then? Are you not together?" Holysaber asked. Perhaps meeting the Ignis based on him directly would explain the dream he had.

"No. We got split up when the Cyberse World was attacked. We barely made it out alive." Ai answered sadly. Five years had passed since he and Divine Ignis split up and he hadn't heard even a single clue about him. Since Flame didn't know anything either, that means Divine Ignis never returned to the Cyberse World before its destruction.

"I know it must be hard to believe, but it's the truth." Playmaker understood that the story would sound ridiculous to people who don't know the whole situation. He himself was skeptical about Ai being an AI with free will until their battle at Tower of Hanoi.

"Oh, I assure you that I'm not doubting you. I believe everything you've told me." Holysaber replied. Yes, there's the fact that Ai and Flame exhibit human traits, but even without them, Holysaber could

just tell that they were telling the truth. He didn't know why. He just had a feeling for it.

"Why don't you join us?" Soulburner suddenly suggested.

"Pardon?" Holysaber blinked, not sure that he heard it right.

"Like you, only recently I learned about the Lost Incident, Knights of Hanoi, and Ignis. The Hanoi are gone. But the Cyberse World was attacked. There's a new incident. So, I decided to confront my life together with Flame. Why don't you come with us too? We can overcome our past together." Knowing Holysaber is just like him, still struggling with the memories of their horrid past, Soulburner couldn't stay quiet. He had done some stupid things because of his inability to let go, making trouble for his grandparents and his friend back in his hometown. Now that he has decided not to run away, he wants to help Holysaber too. Alone might be difficult, but together, it's possible for them to overcome their past.

"That's a good idea! Besides, who knows what that masked guy and the one behind him will do if you don't fight with us like they told you to? There's no guarantee they won't attack you again!" Ai added to the persuasion. Having more people by their side would make it better for them in fighting against the new enemies. Plus, if they stick around with Holysaber who is Divine Ignis' Origin, the possibility of meeting with the Divine Ignis would be quicker.

Holysaber didn't answer right away. He finally got the answer he had been waiting for about his kidnapping, but let alone feeling relieved, he became more confused because now he has more questions more than answers.

Confronting his life, his past, that indeed perhaps is the only way for him to truly let go of his past. But that was easier said than done. Facing his past means he must duel again, and most likely one that would endanger his life. He may have to experience the same pain as he did ten years ago. Though he had dueled twice and emerged victorious without his trauma overwhelming him, there's no telling

them that he can do the same next time. In those two occasions, the only reason he could get ahold of himself was thanks to Ryuki and Saint Kuriboh being there for him. What if he is in a situation where he is only by himself with no one to help him? He'd be helpless. If he screwed up, not only may he break, but he'll also become a hindrance for Playmaker and Soulburner.

He's afraid. Afraid of disappointing himself and letting down the people around him because of his inability to confront his fear.

"I'm sorry… Please, give me some time to think this over. I'll contact you once I made my decision." Holysaber finally answered them.

Ai looked like he was about to say something more, but Playmaker blocked him from saying anything.

"We understand. It must be too much to take in so quickly. Take your time." Playmaker only needed to see Holysaber's downcast expression to know that the idea of fighting together with them and confronting his trauma is no different from reliving that very same past he tried hard to forget. It's not something that other people could force him to do. It'd be meaningless if Holysaber himself doesn't have the will to fight for himself. Soulburner also didn't say anything to object either. Both of them understood Holysaber's fear more than anyone, because they were in his position before.

Holysaber logged out, thanking Playmaker and Soulburner in his mind for allowing him to recollect himself.

"Why did you let him go? We could've convinced him if we push a bit more." Ai asked his partner, not understanding why his partner didn't let him speak up to persuade a potential strong ally.

"He is still in dilemma. Pushing him to join us when his heart is struggling wouldn't do him and us any good. This is something that he must decide himself. We can't do anything about this." Flame answered instead. The Fire Ignis could sense similarities between Holysaber and Soulburner. When he first met Soulburner, he was

also reluctant to confront his past. It took a lot more than his encouragement to convince his Origin.

"As Flame said. Holysaber needs to sort out his mind. This is an important decision in his life, one that would determine his future." Playmaker couldn't agree more. After all, it took him years until he decided to take up his deck again and fight.

All they can do now was waiting for Holysaber's answer.

Kento's Room - Hijiri Residence

Kazue tried her best to finish her club before Kento's promised time to meet Playmaker, but unfortunately, she had too much on her plate, so she missed out reading Kento's mail. She checked her phone only until after she finished her club, which was 10 minutes since Kento sent the mail to inform her. He didn't tell her the place of the meeting either. Thus, Kazue now was waiting for Kento in his room, comfortably sitting on the cushion while drinking the tea that Kento's aunt had prepared for her.

After 45 minutes of waiting, the blue sphere that surrounded Kento disappeared, meaning that Kento had logged out from LINK VRAINS and returned to the real world.

"You're back. How is it?" Kazue asked.

However, Kento didn't answer her. He didn't even move from his chair, just sat still with his head looking at the ceiling.

"Kento?" Kazue called out worriedly.

There was five seconds pause before Kento finally opened his mouth.

"Other than Playmaker, I met a Duelist named Soulburner. He is also a victim like me and Playmaker." Kento told her without looking away

from the ceiling.

"So, what the masked Duelist told us was true." Observing Kento's tired face, Kazue knew there was still more to it. "What did you talk about?"

Kento slowly facing her. Seeing him eye-to-eye, Kazue saw variants of emotions from his eyes. She didn't say anything, waiting until Kento started to reveal his entire conversation with Playmaker and the other lost incident victim, Soulburner. The Knights of Hanoi were responsible for their kidnapping ten years ago. They were forced to Duel repeatedly for six months all for the sake of creating seven AIs with free wills called the Ignis. The AI they met at the Cyberse World before was an Ignis. The Ignis were created for the sake of becoming the successor to humanity. However, the Knights of Hanoi then decided to erase them after deeming them a threat to humanity instead. Now, the Ignis split up after their world was attacked. Playmaker and Soulburner offered him to join them.

"I see… How awful…" Kazue clenched her fists. She couldn't believe that Kento and the other victims suffered under the excuse for the sake of humanity. They're just treating Kento's suffering as a necessary sacrifice, only for the A.I.s born from those sufferings being deemed as a threat and became targets of elimination. Then what did Kento, and the others suffer for? They claimed that they did so for the good of humanity, but to her, it was nothing more for the sake of self-satisfaction. All lives would eventually come to an inevitable end. There is no meaning in eternal life.

Kazue slowly breath in and out to calm the anger swelling up in her. The thing about the incident and Ignis can wait. What matters most now is Kento's state of mind. All these revelations must be too much to be taken all at once. And most of all, he's thinking about Playmaker and Soulburner's proposition to him.

"You are still unsure what to do, aren't you?" Kazue stood up to get closer to Kento. Looking at him closer, it's obvious in his face that

he's torn between wanting to accept to move on or rejecting it to keep himself in his comfort zone.

"Sorry, Big Sis, I think I'll take a nap for a bit…" Kento moved from his chair to his bed, slumping his head to his soft pillow and let the fluffiness take away his consciousness. He was too tired to even bother taking off his socks. It didn't take three minutes for him to drift off to sleep.

"Kento…" Kazue murmured quietly, watching Kento's sleeping face.

It's been a long time since he slipped to calling her 'Big Sis' like he did when they were children. His state of mind must be more in a shamble than she imagined to the point he reverted to calling her that. Seeing him asleep like this, for a second, she saw him back as a little boy who liked to cling to her whenever he was anxious. She had an urge to ruffle his hair when seeing his restless sleeping face but refrained as to not waking him up. To make his sleep more comfortable, she loosened the collar of his uniform and removed his wristband.

The last time she remembered him sleeping like this was after the kidnapping when he stayed over at her house. In the middle of the night, he screamed in terror, waking up the whole people in the house, including her. He was having another nightmare about when he was still imprisoned in the small white room. It took hours to calm him down and lulled him to sleep again. She decided to stay up watching over him in case he was having another nightmare. While he didn't wake up abruptly, she could tell from his expression that his dream was not a good one.

It pained her to see her friend suffering. On one hand, she wanted to wake him up from his nightmare. On the other hand, his body needed rest. Though it pained her, she decided not to force him to wake up because she deemed a rest necessary for him.

The next day, when she took him back to his house, she regretted not waking him up that night.

8 Years Ago

After sleeping overnight, Kazue took Kento back to his house with her father. Kento looked worn out throughout their way back to his house. His aunt and uncle couldn't help asking him what happened. Kento only told them that he couldn't sleep well because of the nightmare, prompting Kazue's father to explain what happened last night. After knowing the whole story, Kento's aunt and uncle told him to take a rest in his room since he's obviously still tired. Kento complied and went back to his room while his uncle and aunt talked with Kazue and her father.

Hoping to cheer up her nephew, Kento's aunt decided to bake his favorite pound cake and asked Kazue to call him. His room was on the first floor and not far from the kitchen, he should be able to hear her voice, but Kazue didn't want to put Kento in a bad mood because of her shouting, so she went directly to his room. Though he was tired, she doubted he could get any sleep out of fear of the nightmare.

"Tsurugi! Tsurugi!" Kazue knocked on Kento's room as she called him. However, there was no respond coming from inside. She held the doorknob and found it wasn't locked. She peaked in and saw his room was quite dark, the only light coming from the thin window cover and the bathroom.

"I know you're here. No use trying to pretend that you're not." She didn't hesitate to come in and went straight to the bedroom where she knew he was hiding when he still didn't answer her.

"Auntie is calling for us. She said she's baking your favorite cake for snack. Let's eat it together." She stood in front of the bathroom, giving her friend last chance to come out himself.

Now that she was close to the bathroom, she heard continuous running water. The faucet hadn't been turned off completely. It's strange for Kento not to turn it off. No matter how much he's trying to

hide, he won't let water be wasted like that. Getting impatient, Kazue finally barged into the bathroom to drag out Kento herself.

"Tsurugi, what are you doing-"

Kazue froze when the floor was stained by red-colored water that came to her view. Her body began to tremble before she even realized it herself. Then, as if enticed by a spell, she slowly turned towards the bathtub where the water came from. Her blood ran cold when she saw who was in the bathtub.

Kento's back leaning on the bathtub with his right arm dangling from the tub while his left arm was submerged in the water. Not far below his dangling arm was a sharp blood-stained razor.

"Tsu… Tsurugi…?" Kazue's entire body trembled seeing Kento's face become paler in every second.

A low moan from Kento was what snapped her out. She dashed out of Kento's room, shouting for help with all her might, not caring about her hurt throat nor the tears that dampened her face.

"A-AUNTIE! UNCLE! FATHER! HELP! TSURUGI… TSURUGI IS… !"

It didn't take long for everyone in the house to respond to her shouting. Kento's uncle quickly administered first aid before they took Kento to the nearest hospital in her father's car. She remembered her father telling her to wait back home, but she insisted on waiting for Kento's result. As she was the first one to find him and in a state of shock, she was taken to a doctor, accompanied by her father, to check on her psychological condition. But Kazue didn't care for any of that, all she hoped for was for Kento to be saved.

After hours of waiting, to everyone utter relief, the doctor announced that Kento was finally in a stable condition. If Kazue had found him any later, the doctors wouldn't be able to save him. However, this relief was short-lived, because now they realized that Kento's mental

condition was far from getting better. His trauma had affected him in the worst way possible.

Present Time

Kazue carefully touched the scars on his left wrist as the memory came to her like it just happened yesterday. That was the first suicide attempt. Since then, he required constant monitoring to prevent him from trying to take his own life whenever he could. It was a struggle. When slitting his own wrist didn't work, he tried various methods to end his life. No matter how many times they consulted with therapist, Kento didn't get any better.

His attempt five years ago, when he was 12, was the closest attempt to being almost successful. Afterward, his attempts have diminished, but not stopping altogether. She always worried about leaving him alone and would insist on accompanying him as often as she could even if he'd find her annoying. She would rather be being treated as an annoyance rather than let him die outside her watch.

She looked away from Kento's sleeping face to a photograph on his desk. In the photo was her in the middle, Kento on her right, and then a young man with brown hair with darker shade of brown spikes and fair skin. She was wearing her Den Academy uniform, but Kento and the other guy were wearing the standard navy blue-colored gakuran with yellow buttons.

"It was only after he met you that he stopped wanting to die." Kazue murmured, touching the face of the person next to Kento in the photo. Her eyes stared at him with evident affection, one she would only give to the one whom she gave her heart to.

Recalling the times spent with the person in the picture, she smiled sadly. Since Kento hung out with this person, his suicidal urges only came out during panic attacks. Both she and Kento considered him a savior, the light that pulled Kento out from the pitch-black despair

that was haunting him. That's partially why she fell in love with this young man.

"I don't want to lose another person precious to me…" Kazue hugged the photo tight to her chest. That person was not here anymore to pull Kento out from the brink. She was the only one by his side now. She must be the one to stop Kento from opening death's door.

Kazue carefully placed the photo back in its place. She looked at the person in the photo determinedly.

"Please lend me your strength."

Borrowing Kento's laptop, she logged into her mail account and started typing,

Playmaker,

I'd like to talk to all of you again. There is something important that I must tell you. Please come to this coordinate tomorrow after school hour.

I'll be waiting for you.

Holysaber

She then pressed the 'sent' keyboard, sending the mail to the address that Playmaker used to contact Kento before.

She won't stay quiet. As Kento's childhood friend, she'd help him in any way she could.

LINK VRAINS - The Next Day

Ryuki had chosen the perfect time to execute her plan. After school, she had asked her brother to keep Kento busy in real life by playing with him when he came to visit until she's done with her business

here. Since Kento already promised to play with Minoru before, he wouldn't refuse her little brother's request. Even if he found out and came here, by then, it was already too late for him to interfere. It's not that she didn't trust her childhood friend. It's just, as someone who cares a lot about him, she must see for herself the people who offered a helping hand to him. There are things that you can only know with your own eyes rather than hearing second-hand.

It didn't take a few minutes and the recipient of her mail arrived, riding on their respective D-Boards with their two AI partners popping out from their Duel Disks. When Ai saw her, he pointed his finger at her. Though she couldn't hear him from afar, she could tell he still remembered her and was surprised to see her there instead of Holysaber.

"Hello, gentlemen." Ryuki greeted them once they landed.

"It's you!" Ai yelled while still pointing an accusing finger at her.

"You know her?" Playmaker asked.

"I also met her in the Cyberse World. She is Holysaber's friend that I told you about." Ai reminded.

"Yes. My name is Ryuki. It is a pleasure to meet you. I wished to meet you after hearing the story from Holysaber yesterday." Ryuki revealed.

She then held her hand up. A yellow digital orb appeared on her palm, flying up and then spread into a dome that covered the entire area.

"This is a special program to make sure outsiders can listen to us. I don't want any interruption either." Ryuki explained before they misunderstood her intention.

"You're the one who sent that mail?" Playmaker guessed, to which Ryuki replied with a nod.

"I apologize for deceiving you. However, I wish to clarify something." Ryuki's demeanor turned serious. Her polite smile had gone from her face.

"Clarify? With us?" Soulburner repeated in confusion.

"I'll be honest, I do not trust you." Ryuki didn't beat around the bush and spoke out her mind. "Holysaber already told me everything. After visiting the Cyberse World myself, I believe that your story is not a lie. But that's not what I want to discuss."

The thing about the Ignis and Cyberse World were important, but her priority right now was not knowing more about their circumstances, but to see the kind of people Playmaker, Soulburner, and their A.I. partners were and if whether she can trust them enough to be Holysaber's companion.

"I was the one who told him that perhaps meeting the other victims who shared the same pain as him would help him find his answer. But trusting you to fight together with Holysaber is a different matter." Sharing the same traumatic experience doesn't make them friends. Each person has a different way of coping with their trauma. Unless they're capable of understanding each other like the way her deceased boyfriend did with Kento, she can't trust them to help Kento in his path.

"I believe you don't need me to tell you if you are victims of the incident, I'm sure you know how hard it is after what happened. There were many times Holysaber was close to his breaking point. Watching him suffer was painful for me, especially when I could do nothing to ease his suffering." Ryuki always cursed her helplessness. No matter what she did, she couldn't get Kento out of his shell. She stopped him whenever he tried to end his life, but that's it. Nothing she did can convince him to stop wishing for death.

"Facing one's trauma is never easy. One wrong step, his soul might break forever. At worst, he may lose his life in the process." Ryuki clenched her fists from remembering Kento's hard times. After years,

he finally started to recover, for Kento to revert to the way he was is something Ryuki would never let happen.

"That's why, I want you to show me the proof." Ryuki raised her Duel Disk. "Show me the proof that you have what it takes to support him."

"A proof that we can support him? Haven't you seen what we are capable of in the battles against Knights of Hanoi? We are strong enough to defeat enemies in our way! And with Soulburner and Flame on our side, we have more strength on our side!" Ai argued, not seeing the point of Ryuki's challenge.

"That's not what she meant." Playmaker told Ai without removing his gaze from Ryuki.

"Huh? It's not? Then what is it?" Ai asked again, looking at his partner and then at Ryuki.

"Ai, to support someone through thick and thin requires not only skill to see it through, but also determination to commit to it. If our wills are weak, then we don't have the right to say we'll help Holysaber." Flame explained, inwardly sighing at the Dark Ignis' slow thinking.

Playmaker and Soulburner didn't say anything. They knew that what Flame was saying was right. Playmaker already settled his past. Soulburner had set his heart to fight. Playmaker could accept Soulburner's help and trusted him because not only they are fellow victims, Soulburner had helped him chasing after Jin's kidnapper and Ai trusted Flame while the latter also providing them with bits of information. And to Soulburner, Playmaker is his hero who fought against the people responsible for their suffering ten years ago.

Holysaber was quite different. Though he was also a victim of the Lost Incident, he was still wavering. From the way he acted when they met yesterday, his condition seemed to be worse than both Playmaker and Soulburner imagined. It bothered them when Ryuki went as far as saying that facing his past may put his very life on the

line. Why did she say it like that? True, the battle ahead of them would be dangerous, but they have a feeling that Ryuki meant something else. There is more to Holysaber than he lets on.

"Alright. Let's do this then." Soulburner stepped to the front, raising his Duel Disk in response.

"Soulburner… !" Playmaker was a bit surprised that Soulburner took the initiative to accept her challenge.

"Playmaker, let me handle this. Holysaber is just like me. The two of us are still trying to face our past. Besides, I'm the one who first suggested that he join us." Soulburner said. He was serious when he said that Holysaber should join them to face their past together. He sincerely wants to help Holysaber, like how Playmaker inspired him. He'll convey his sincerity and determination through his Dueling.

As Ryuki didn't want to attract attention from outsiders, they settled to do Master Duel inside the dome.

"Duel!"

Ryuki LP: 4000

Soulburner LP: 4000

"I'm taking the first turn." Ryuki doesn't know anything about Soulburner, but if he is working alongside Playmaker and a victim like Holysaber that decided to face his life, then he's not someone to be underestimated.

"From my hand, I summon Hieroglyphic Dragon - Dragon Nuit." Ryuki summoned a humanoid dragon with a silverish body and golden armor with a tail and pair of wings.

Hieroglyphic Dragon - Dragon Nuit
(DRAGON/LIGHT/EFFECT/ATK: 1700/DEF: 900/LV: 4)

"I activate Equip Spell: Dragon Shield of the Egypt. Dragon-Type monster equipped with this card cannot be destroyed by Battle or card effects. Neither player takes any Battle Damage involving this card." Ryuki equipped a round-shaped green shield with golden dragon-shaped pattern to Nuit.

"I activate Nuit's effect. When this card is targeted by Spell, Trap, or monster effect, I can Special Summon 1 Dragon-Type monster from my hand, Deck, or Graveyard with its ATK and DEF becomes 0." Ryuki summoned a purple-skinned dragon with similar gold armor to the zone next to Nuit in Attack Position.

Hieroglyphic Dragon - Dragon Aset
(DRAGON/LIGHT/EFFECT/ATK: 0/DEF: 0/LV: 5)

"I activate Magic Card: Hieroglyphic Seal of Supremacy. I can Special Summon 1 Hieroglyphic Monster from my hand." She summoned a red-eyed yellow-skinned with gold armor in Attack Position next to Aset.

Hieroglyphic Dragon - Dragon Geiv
(DRAGON/LIGHT/EFFECT/ATK: 1800/DEF: 400/LV: 4)

"Appear, the circuit of protectors!" Ryuki summoned the Link portal on her field.

"Arrowheads confirmed. The summoning condition is two Dragon type monsters. I set Nuit and Aset to the Link Markers! Circuit combined!" Ryuki set Nuit to the bottom-right arrow and Aset to the bottom-left arrow.

"Link Summon! Come forth, Link 2, Hieroglyphic Seal of the Celestial Sphere!" She summoned a sphere-shaped monster emitting bright, orange-colored energy in the Extra Monster Zone.

Hieroglyphic Seal of the Celestial Sphere
(DRAGON/LIGHT/LINK/ATK: 0/LNK: 2/LM: Bottom-Right, Bottom-Left)

"Appear once more, circuit of the dragons!" Ryuki set Geiv to the left arrow of the portal.

"Link Summon! Appear, Link 1, Guardragon Elpy!" She summoned a limbless black-winged wyvern-like monster with shining yellow orb on its chest to the zone pointed by Celestial Sphere's bottom-left link arrow.

Guardragon Elpy (DRAGON/DARK/LINK/ATK: 1000/LNK: 1/LM: Left)

"I activate Dragon Shield of the Egypt's effect from my Graveyard. When I have a Dragon-Type Link Monster in the same zone of the monster previously equipped with this card, I can move that Link Monster to the zone next to it by banishing this card from the Graveyard." Ryuki banished her Equip Spell to move Elpy to the zone right below the Extra Monster Zone.

"I activate Guardragon Elpy's effect. Once per turn, during my Main Phase, I can Special Summon 1 of my Dragon monsters from hand or Deck to the zone that 2 or more Link Monsters point to." From her Deck, Ryuki summoned another copy of Aset with its ATK and DEF intact. She summoned it to the zone pointed by both Seal of the Celestial Spheres' bottom-left arrow and Pisty's right arrow.

Hieroglyphic Dragon - Dragon Aset (DRAGON/LIGHT/EFFECT/ATK: 1900/DEF: 1200/LV: 5)

"I end my turn." Ryuki concluded.

"Wow. True to her name, all her monsters are Dragon-Type monsters." Ai said with awe at all the dragons on Ryuki's Field. "But all of them have a rather average ATK and DEF."

"Three dragon monsters on the Monster Zones, no set card, and only one card in hand. She paid a lot to set up her field, but all the monsters she summoned didn't have high ATK or DEF. What is she planning?" Playmaker wondered. He doesn't think she's bluffing

when she challenges them. She has full confidence in her skill as a Duelist. This first move was perhaps to observe how Soulburner will respond.

"My Turn! From my hand, I activate Salamangreat Meer's effect! By sending a Salamangreat monster from my hand to the Graveyard, I can Special Summon Meer to my field!" Soulburner sent Salamangreat Falco from his hand to the Graveyard and then summoned Meer in Attack Position.

Salamangreat Meer (CYBERSE/FIRE/EFFECT/ATK: 800/DEF: 600/LV: 2)

"I activate Salamangreat Falco's effect in my Graveyard! By returning a Salamangreat monster I control to my hand, I can Special Summon Falco to the field!" Soulburner returned Meer to his hand, replacing it with Falco.

Salamangreat Falco (CYBERSE/FIRE/EFFECT/ATK: 1200/DEF: 1600/LV: 4)

"As Meer is added to my hand other than my normal draw, I activate its effect to Special Summon It!" He summoned Meer again back to his Field.

"And then I Normal Summon Salamangreat Jack Jaguar!" He summoned Jack Jaguar in Attack Position next to Meer in the Main Monster Zone.

Salamangreat Jack Jaguar (CYBERSE/FIRE/EFFECT/ATK: 1800/DEF: 1200/LV: 4)

"Appear! The circuit that changes the future!" Soulburner summoned the Link Portal on his Field.

"Arrowheard confirmed! The summoning condition is two FIRE Effect monsters! I set Meer, Falco, and Jack Jaguar to the Link Markers! Circuit combined!" Soulburner set Meer to the top-center arrow,

Falco to the bottom-left arrow, and Jack Jaguar to the bottom-right arrow.

"Surging flame, awaken the king of beasts that runs through the fire prairie! Link Summon! Appear, Link 3, Salamangreat Heatleo!" Soulburner summoned his ace monster to the Extra Monster Zone.

Salamangreat Heatleo (ATK: 2300/LNK: 3/LM: Bottom-left, Top, Bottom-right)

"I take it that's your ace monster?" Ryuki asked while staring at the summoned Heatleo.

"That's right. Behold the power of Heatleo! Go, Soulburner!" Flame declared.

"Battle! I attack Seal of the Celestial Sphere with Heatleo!" Soulburner started his Battle Phase, pointing at Ryuki's monster with the lowest ATK.

"At this moment, I activate Seal of the Celestial Sphere' effect! Once during the opponent's turn, if this card is in the Extra Monster Zone, I can Release 1 monster from my hand or Field to return 1 face-up card on the Field to the hand!" Ryuki released Aset, changing the dragon into purplish flame that energized the spheres. Ryuki then pointed at the incoming Heatleo. The spheres around Celestial Sphere revealed their wings and then flew towards Heatleo.

"I activate Salamangreat Hyena's effect from my hand! When my opponent activates an effect during my Battle Phase while I control a Salamangreat monster, I can send this card to the Graveyard to negate that effect, but the Battle Phase also ends!" Soulburner sent Hyena to the Graveyard, allowing Heatleo to dodge Celestial Sphere's attack at the cost its own attack had to be cancelled.

"I activate Aset's effect. When this card is Released, I can Special Summon 1 Normal Dragon Monster from my hand, Deck, or

Graveyard, and make its ATK and DEF 0." Ryuki summoned a monster resembling Celestial Sphere, in the far left of the Field.

Hieroglyphic Seal of the Dragon God
(DRAGON/LIGHT/NORMAL/ATK: 0/DEF: 0/LV: 8)

"She quickly replaced the dragon she just tributed with another one!" Ai commented in surprise.

"That's why she chose to summon another copy of Aset, so she could use its effect to summon a new dragon." Playmaker added, looking carefully at Ryuki's Field.

"But its ATK and DEF are 0. It's also a Normal Monster, so it doesn't have any effect. What can she do with that dragon?" Ai tilted his head to the side in confusion.

"Soulburner, don't let your guard down. She's no amateur." Flame warned his partner. Ever since the Duel began, he could feel her fighting spirit. On the outside, she might look small and delicate, but that was nothing but appearance. Her will to fight was evident in every move she made.

"Yeah." Soulburner took that to the heart, because like Flame, he could also feel her determination. For now, this should be enough. "I set a card and end my turn."

"My Turn. Draw." Ryuki looked at the card she just drew. She kept the card before picking the other card in her hand.

"I activate Magic Card: Contract with the Dragon Lords! I pay 2000 LP to draw cards equal to the number of Dragon-Type monsters I control on the field!" Ryuki has 3 Dragon-Type monsters on her Field, so she drew 3 cards from her Deck, halving her own LP in the process.

Ryuki LP: 4000 = 2000

"Appear! The circuit of protectors!" Ryuki set Seal of the Dragon God to the right Link Arrow of the portal.

"Link Summon! Come forth! Link 1, Guardragon Pisty!" She summoned black-colored dragon with white wings and crimson red rob on its chest to the Extra Monster Zone, replacing Seal of the Dragon God.

Guardragon Pisty (DRAGON/DARK/LINK/ATK: 1000/LNK: 1/LM: Left)

"I activate Field Spell: Dragon's Save Haven. Once per turn, I can send one card from my hand to the Graveyard to move a Dragon-Type Monster to an empty zone in both Extra Monster Zone or Main Monster Zone." Ryuki moved Pisty from Extra Monster Zone to the Main Monster Zone, next to Elpy, only separated by one empty zone.

For a second, Flame was confused why she bothered moving her monster to another zone. He then recalled Pisty's effect. And save for their colors, Elpy resembled Pisty. "Wait, don't tell me that she's planning to… !"

"I activate Pisty's effect. Once per turn during my Main Phase, I can Special Summon a Dragon-Type monster from my hand or Deck to the zone that two or more Link Monsters point to." Ryuki pointed at the now empty zone where Elpy just occupied a moment ago. Green whirwild emerged from the zone along with a sillhouette of a monster within it.

"I knew it! It has the same effect as Elpy!" Flame was both shocked and astonished.

"The monster can only be summoned to a zone pointed by two or more Link Arrows. That's why she activated that Field Spell." Soulburner stared at Ryuki's monster zone, wondering what kind of dragon that Ryuki would summon now.

"Two-headed dragon who commands the wind, ascend and blow away the fog that led people astray! Come forth, Guardragon Andrake!" Ryuki summoned Andrake from her Deck to the zone pointed by Elpy and Pisty's Link Arrows. It has the form of a two-headed dragon, the left head and wing were green in color with white fur, while the right head and wing were black in color. A green, emerald sphere etched on the dragon's chest.

Guardragon Andrake (DRAGON/WIND/EFFECT/ATK: 2000/DEF: 600/LV: 4)

"When Guardragon Andrake is Special Summoned from hand or Deck, I can double this card's original ATK and DEF until the end of the next turn."

Guardragon Andrake ATK & DEF: 2000 & 600 = 4000 & 1200

"Let me guess, this dragon is your ace monster?" Now, it's Soulburner's time to ask Ryuki.

"Correct. You better not underestimate Andrake." Ryuki smiled proudly at the appearance of her ace monster. Time to set the preparation for her counterattack.

"I activate Contract of the Dragon Lord's additional effect. I can banish this card from the Graveyard to Special Summon a Normal Dragon-Type Monster from my Graveyard." Ryuki revived Seal of the Dragon God in Attack Position.

"From my hand, I summon Aset." Ryuki summoned a third copy of Aset in Attack Position in the Main Monster Zone.

" *She summoned another copy of Aset again? Is she planning to summon another monster with its effect?"* Soulburner wondered. But remembering Aset's effect before, she can only summon a Normal Monster with its ATK and DEF become 0. Is there any point to activate that effect now?

"Aset can be Normal Summoned without Releasing, but its original ATK became 1000." Ryuki revealed just as Aset's prowess was weakened.

Hieroglyphic Dragon - Aset Dragon ATK: 1900 = 1000

"Hey, hey, not only that dragon can only Special Summon Normal Monster with 0 ATK and DEF, now it's ATK became 1000. Isn't this a bad move?" Ai pointed out. No matter how he looked at it, Ryuki's move was only detrimental to herself.

"No. This is part of my plan." Ryuki replied, smiling softly.

"I activate Aset's additional effect. Once per turn, I can target 1 face-up Dragon-Type Normal Monster on the Field, the Levels of all face-up Hieroglyphic monsters on the Field become the level of that monster until the End Phase." She chose Seal of the Dragon God, changing Aset's own Level from 5 to 8.

"Now she has two Level 8 monsters." Playmaker pointed out.

"Don't tell me… !" Ai paled as realization hit him. When there were two monsters with the same level on the Field it could only mean one thing.

"I Overlay Level 8 Seal of the Dragon God and Level 8 Aset!" Ryuki held out both of her arms, palms flat and facing downward representing two monsters that she declared, before placing her hands over one another, causing her Duel Disk to shine and yellow-colored sparks shot above her, opening the Overlay Network. Seal of the Dragon God and Aset became particles of data and entered nodes on the Overlay Network. Energy flows in four beams past Ryuki creating a portal in front of her from which her Xyz Monster emerged.

"Xyz Summon! Appear, Rank 8, Hieroglyphic Heavenly Dragon - Ennead!" Ryuki summoned a red-skinned and golden armored dragon to the Extra Monster Zone in Attack Position.

Hieroglyphic Heavenly Dragon - Ennead
(DRAGON/LIGHT/XYZ/ATK: 3000/DEF: 2400/ORU: 2/RNK: 8)

"For real?! An Xyz Monster?!" Soulburner gasped, almost dumbstruck by the appearance of the Xyz Monster.

"Soulburner, the situation is not good for us…" Flame said with barely concealed nervousness. "Well, at least, even if we lose, I won't be taken away or anything."

"Hey! I haven't lost yet!" Soulburner protested at his partner for already thinking about the end.

"Battle! I attack Heatleo with Ennead! Ray of Heliopolis!" Ryuki declared her Battle Phase. Ennead shot a stream of fiery purplish red blast from its mouth straight towards Heatleo.

"Not so fast! Trap Card: Energy of Fire! When an opponent's monster declares an attack, I can shuffle a Salamangreat monster in my Graveyard to my Deck and gain LP equal to its ATK, and prevent my monster being destroyed by that Battle!" Soulburner opened his Reverse Card. He shuffled Jack Jaguar back to his Deck from his Graveyard, increasing his LP by 1800.

Soulburner LP: 4000 = 5800

The attack continues. Ennead's blast burns Heatleo, but the Salamangreat monster endured the scorching flame with its own until the blast dissipitated and Heatleo kept standing tall on Soulburner's Field.

Soulburner LP: 5800 = 5100

"But I still have three dragons on my side!" Ryuki reminded.

She had expected the possibility of Soulburner foiling her attack. That's why she summoned Ennead in the first place. It was the right decision. Even though Soulburner had stopped Ennead's attack, she

still has Andrake to destroy Heatleo, since the Trap's effect only worked once to prevent destruction. And once Andrake destroyed Heatleo, Soulburner would be open for Elpy and Pisty to attack. Even though it won't be enough to defeat him, his LP would be depleted greatly.

"I also activate Dragon's Safe Haven additional effect! When I have more than 2 Dragon-Type monsters on my Field, all Dragon-Type Link Monsters I control gains 500 ATK!" Ryuki increased Elpy and Pisty's ATKs.

Guardragon Elpy & Guardragon Pisty ATK: 1000 = 1500

"I attack Heatleo with Andrake! Serpentine Squall!" Ryuki commenced her second attack.

Andrake spread its wings. The gem on its chest glowed brightly, filling the two-headed dragon with energies sparkling like gemstones. The winds gathered around Andrake in whirlwind motion until the dragon's wings closed momentarily before spreading it wide open along with a roar, sending gust of winds at Heatleo, cutting the Salamangreat monster until nothing was left.

Soulburner LP: 5100 = 3400

Soulburner was blown away several steps back. He quickly got back to his feet, but that didn't last long as another dragon flew towards him.

"Next, I attack directly with Elpy!" Ryuki commenced her second attack.

Elpy tackled Soulburner to the ground again with its tail, sending him onto his back.

Soulburner LP: 3400 = 1900

"Lastly, I attack directly with Pisty!" Ryuki didn't bother waiting for Soulburner to stand up. She won't hold back.

When Soulburner was still on his knees, Pisty also used its tail to once again send him sprawling to the ground, knocking the wind out of the Salamangreat user.

Soulburner LP: 1900 = 400

"Argh! This is bad! This is bad! Soulburner got his butt kicked!" Ai started to panic as he watched Soulburner beaten up.

"To think she read his move that far." Playmaker never thought that Ryuki would do this well. She's more skilled than he imagined. If they Duel, even he wouldn't have it easy.

"I set a card and end my turn." Ryuki concluded. Seeing Soulburner struggling to get up, she said, "I hope this is not the end for you. If you're done only because of this, then I must ask you to forget about supporting Holysaber."

"Are you okay, Soulburner?" Flame asked worriedly.

"Y-yeah. I'm not done yet! This won't be enough to take me down!" Soulburner stood up again, ignoring his body's pain. Even though he's at a great disadvantage, his heart was beating so fast, his entire body was shaking with excitement. It's been a while since he had such a thrilling Duel.

"My turn! Draw!" Soulburner looked at the card he just drew. He grinned as he activated the card immediately.

"I activate Magic Card: Flame Revival! I can Special Summon a FIRE Monster from either player's Graveyard, and then draw 1 card! Come back to me, Heatleo!" Soulburner revived his ace monster back to his Field before drawing a card from his Deck.

"I activate Field Spell: Salamangreat Sanctuary! When I Link Summon a Salamangreat Link Monster, the effect of Salamangreat Sanctuary allows me to use a monster with the same name as Link Material instead!" Soulburner activated the second card in his hand.

A red summoning circle appeared above his Field. Heatleo changed into a flame that went into the portal, and then an even bigger and fiery flame burst out of the portal in the shape of a beast.

"Surging flame, awaken Heatleo's true strength with the power of purification! Reincarnation Link Summon! Be reborn, Salamangreat Heatleo!" The flame surrounding the beast dissolved, revealing Heatleo in the Extra Monster Zone.

"I activate Heatleo's effect! When this card is Link Summoned, I can shuffle a card in my opponent's Spell and Trap Zone into their Deck! Resounding Roar!" Soulburner pointed at Ryuki's Dragon's Safe Haven. Heatleo unleashed flame from its mouth, blasting the said Field Spell, shuffling it back to Ryuki's Deck.

"Additionally, as Heatleo is Link Summoned using a card with the same name as Material this turn, I can activate its effect to change an opponent's monster's ATK to that of a monster in my Graveyard!" Soulburner chose Ennead and made the Xyz Monster's ATK to the same as Meer that was in the Graveyard.

Hieroglyphic Heavenly Dragon - Ennead ATK: 3000 = 800

"Battle! I attack Ennead with Heatleo! Heat Soul!" Soulburner declared his Battle Phase.

Heatleo whirled its body, forming a twister of crimson flame that incinerated Ennead into ashes blown away by the wind. Ryuki was thrown a few steps back from the impact of her monster's destruction but managed to keep her standing.

Ryuki LP: 2000 = 500

"I set a card and end my turn." Soulburner concluded his turn.

"Since my opponent's turn has ended, Andrake's ATK and DEF revert to its original ATK and DEF." Ryuki stated. Andrake's power up only lasted until Soulburner's current turn. Now that it has ended, so did the power up.

Guardragon Andrake ATK & DEF: 4000 & 1200 = 2000 & 600

Soulburner remembered well Andrake's effect. That's why he opted to destroy Ennead whose ATK would still be higher than Heatleo even after the end of his turn, rather than Andrake whose ATK was only superior until his current End Phase. With this, Andrake's ATK is now lower than Heatleo, it won't be able to destroy the Salamangreat Monster.

"Good job, Soulburner! Now they are even!" Ai cheered.

"I'm glad that you're not holding back in the slightest." Ryuki commented while patting dust from her clothes.

"If I want to prove myself to you then holding back is not an option. I won't be able to face my past with half-hearted resolve. That's why I always give it my all in Dueling." Soulburner replied.

"After ten years, what made you decide to finally confront your life?" Ryuki asked. Earlier, he said that he and Holysaber are still trying to face their past. Still trying. This meant that it hadn't been that long since Soulburner made the decision to fight alongside Playmaker.

"In my attempts to forget about that incident, I had done many stupid things and caused trouble to my family and friend back home. I'm just going with the flow, not really caring about my future." Soulburner was a bit taken aback by the sudden question, but he didn't object to answer it.

"But then I met Flame. From him, I learned about what happened to me ten years ago and about Playmaker. For the first time, I found

hope." Watching videos of Playmaker fighting against Knights of Hanoi, the people responsible for the Lost Incident, and emerged victorious, a small ember lit up within Soulburner. The ember of the flame that he had long forgotten.

"It's difficult to confront my past and put it behind me. But Flame and Playmaker showed me that it's not impossible, especially if I have people who support me. I was never alone, yet I didn't realize something so obvious until recently because I was too caught up in my own self-pity." He spoke while remembering how he acted until he met Flame. His grandparents and his friend always scolded him for his foolishness, but he always ignored them because he was in denial. He denied their intention in trying to get him to put the past behind him.

"I don't want to run away anymore. For my own sake and for the sake of people who believed in me." He had made his grandparents and Kiku wait for so long. He won't make them wait any longer than they already had. He'll settle everything with his past and return to them with his head high, ready to walk alongside them to the future.

"Now you said it, Soulburner. As expected from my partner." Flame found himself proud of his Origin. He still has a long way to go to settle his past, but he had taken a huge step to change. Very different from how he did when the Fire Ignis first observed his Origin after ten years.

"You said that, but that doesn't mean you think you already won this Duel, aren't you?" Ryuki asked.

"Huh? You're saying you can turn this around?" Ai asked back from the side.

"Yes. I can." Ryuki answered confidently. She started her Draw Phase. She looked at the card in her hand and then at Soulburner's Field, specifically his Spell & Trap Zone, at the zone where he set up a Reverse Card. She then looked at Andrake and smiled.

"Appear once more, the circuit of protectors!" Ryuki called forth the Link Summoning portal.

"The summoning condition is 2 Dragon-Type monsters! I set Celestial Sphere and Andrake in the Link Markers! Circuits combined!" She set Celestial Sphere at the top-center arrow and Andrake at the bottom-center arrow of the Link Markers.

"Link Summon! Appear, Link 2, Guardragon Agarpain!" She Link Summoned a legless grey-spike scaled dragon wearing white-colored armor with a purple-colored orb attached to its chest to the Extra Monster Zone, replacing Celestial Sphere's position.

Guardragon Agarpain (DRAGON/DARK/LINK/ATK: 1500/LNK: 2/LM: Top-Center, Bottom-Center)

"I activate Guardragon Agarpain's effect. Once per turn during my Main Phase, I can Special Summon 1 Dragon Monster from my Extra Deck to an Extra Monster Zone or Main Monster Zone I can summon to, that 2 or more Link Monsters point to." Ryuki revealed as Agarpain roared, forming a magic circle at the empty zone where Andrake used to be.

"What?! Summoning directly from the Extra Deck?!" Soulburner stared wide-eyed at Agarpain in disbelief.

"And she can place it in either Extra Monster Zone or Main Monster Zone!" Flame was equally shocked. To think she had such a card hidden behind her sleeve.

"Come forth! Rank 6, Hieroglyphic Dragon King - Atumus!" Ryuki summoned indigo-colored scale dragon with golden armor and violet wings to the Main Monster Zone pointed by Agarpain, Elpy, and Pisty's Link Arrows.

Hieroglyphic Dragon King - Atumus (DRAGON/LIGHT/XYZ/ATK: 2400/DEF: 2100/ORU: 0/RNK: 6)

"Another Xyz Dragon." Playmaker commented, once again amazed by Ryuki's summoning.

"But because she summoned it without using any monster as materials, it doesn't have any Overlay Unit. Xyz Monsters cannot activate their effects without Overlay Units." Ai pointed out the deficiency of summoning the Xyz Monster with her way.

"Perhaps she summoned it for the sole purpose of destroying Heatleo before, and then use Elpy or Pisty to deliver Direct Attack." That was the only plan that Playmaker could think of. Atumus' ATK is still above Heatleo even if it's just 100-point difference, still enough to destroy the Salamangreat Monster. Once Heatleo is destroyed, Soulburner's Field would be empty, and he'll be an easy target for Elpy and Pisty to attack.

" *But Soulburner still has a Reverse Card. Maybe that Reverse Card can pull him out of this predicament."* Playmaker stared at Soulburner's Spell & Trap Zone. Seeing Soulburner's gesture, though he was surprised by the appearance of a new Xyz Monster, he didn't look worried.

"Battle! I attack Heatleo with Atumus!" Ryuki immediately declared Battle Phase. Atumus flew forward, mouth opening for a bite at the Salamangreat Link Monster.

"That's what I've been waiting for!" Soulburner grinned cockily. He pointed at his Reverse Card and flipped it open.

"Trap Card: Salamangreat Rage! I target 1 Salamangreat Link Monster I control that was Link Summoned using a monster with its same name as material. Then, I can destroy cards my opponent controls up to that monster's Link Rating!" Soulburner instantly opened his Trap Card, choosing Heatleo as the only Link Monster on his Field. Heatleo is a Link 3 monster, meaning Soulburner could destroy three cards on Ryuki's Field.

"I choose Atumus, Agarpain, and Elpy!" Soulburner declared. Heatleo's body unleashed deep red blazing flames that gathered at Heatleo's hand. The Salamangreat Link Monster then shot three balls of flames that burned the three said monsters, destroying them completely.

However, despite having most of her monsters destroyed, Ryuki smiled, confusing her opponents.

"I say the same to you! I've also been waiting for this!" Ryuki declared as she opened her own Reverse Card.

"What?!" Soulburner and Flame gasped.

"I activate Trap Card: Link Soul! When a Link Monster on my Field is destroyed by a Battle or an effect, I can Special Summon one of its materials from my Graveyard to my Field!" The moment Agarpain was destroyed, Ryuki revived Andrake in Attack Position in the Main Monster Zone.

"I activate Andrake's second effect! When this card is Special Summoned from the Graveyard, I can target 1 monster my opponent controls and destroy it!" Ryuki countered.

"No way!" Soulburner did consider her Reverse Card, but Andrake having another effect like this was not in his speculation.

Just as three of Ryuki's monsters were destroyed, Andrake flapped its wings, forming a twister that obliterated the Salamangreat Link Monster in retaliation.

"Tch. I have no choice then!" Soulburner looked at his Graveyard and pressed one card from it. This was the only way for him to get out of this situation.

"I activate Salamangreat Hyena's effect from the Graveyard, when a Salamangreat Link Monster I control is destroyed by Battle or card effect during Battle Phase, I can Special Summon this card and end

the Battle Phase!" Soulburner revived Hyena to his Main Monster Zone in Defense Position. The hyena-link monster blew out a blast of flame that kept Andrake and Pisty away, ending the Battle.

"You still manage to survive even this far. Your tenacity is impressive. I end my turn." Ryuki concluded. She really thought she had him this time. Whoever thought the monster that he previously sent to the Graveyard turned out to have that kind of effect. The way he countered her strategy was even similar to her own.

"Let me tell you this as well, due to Link Soul's effect, you cannot attack any Link Monster I control until your next End Phase." Ryuki added.

"That means Soulburner can only attack Andrake who has higher ATK than Pisty." Playmaker stated. Soulburner was already in a pinch with his Field being almost empty. Unless he summons a monster with higher ATK than Andrake, Soulburner has no chance of winning.

"You're the first person to drive me to the corner like this. You're amazing!" Soulburner couldn't help but develop respect for the Dragon-user.

Ryuki blinked at Soulburner's reaction. It has been on her mind since a while ago, but Soulburner looked like he enjoyed Dueling. Since he's a victim of the Lost Incident, and only recently decided to fight, she thought he'd be more aversive in Dueling like Holysaber does. Playmaker also didn't show any sign of enjoying Dueling in the footage she had watched.

"You looked like you're enjoying this. I thought after what happened, you wouldn't like the idea of Dueling. Even if you Duel, you won't enjoy it." Ryuki decided to voice her opinion directly to the said person.

"I did. After that incident, I decided to never Duel anymore. It was thanks to Flame pushing me to accept a Duel challenge that I

rediscovered my love for Dueling that I had forgotten." Soulburner smiled fondly at the memory when he finally remembered the sensation that he had forgotten during a Duel that he accepted at Flame's urging.

Ryuki turned her gaze from Soulburner to Flame. He was the one who encouraged Soulburner to face his past. How did he do it, she wondered? No, why did he encourage his partner in the first place? Was he not afraid that urging Soulburner to fight would backfire?

"Flame-san, why did you decide to fight together with Soulburner?" Ryuki questioned the Fire Ignis.

"Because I sensed that Soulburner, my Originator, has unlimited potential. That's why I approached him. I told him everything because I believe he can overcome every trial and tribulation he'll inevitably face in the future. I have faith that my partner can eventually put his past behind him." Flame answered firmly. Having Holysaber by their side would be beneficial for them in the long run, especially when this also concerned the Ignis. But most importantly, his Origin wishes to help Holysaber to be free from his past. As his A.I. partner, Flame would support his Origin's noble intention. And if it weren't for Holysaber enduring those days of despair, then Divine Ignis, his friend, would never be born.

"As the one who convinced him to take this path, it's my duty to guide him however I can. I'll make sure that he won't stray from his path and help him break the shackles of his past." The moment he made up his mind to contact Soulburner directly, Flame also swore that he'd guide his Origin to the right path, the path towards the future where he can be proud of himself and never looked back to his painful past again, completely breaking his ties with it. Soulburner is still young, still growing both in body and mind, he'll make mistakes like any people would. That's why he needs someone who can warn him of the consequences of his actions and admonish him when he makes a mistake.

Ryuki stared sharply at Soulburner and Flame. Only a fool couldn't see the strong unbreakable bond between them. They have the strength and conviction to back up their words. Even now, even though the odds were against them, their fighting spirit didn't diminish even one bit.

Maybe they really can do it. If it's them, they can do what she cannot. They can help Holysaber.

"Can I ask you one question?" Soulburner intruded her thought. When Ryuki nodded, he asked, "You said that making Holysaber face his past is the same as putting his very life on the line. What do you mean by that?"

"I'm afraid that is not something that I can tell you." Telling them about Holysaber's many suicide attempts would make it easier for them to understand what she meant. However, that wasn't her place to tell. Holysaber wouldn't want anyone else to tell his story. If the story is to be revealed, it should be told from Holysaber's own mouth.

"Maybe I'll try to help you convince Holysaber if you can defeat me on this turn." Ryuki challenged them. She has the advantage, but Soulburner had gone beyond her expectation earlier. A part of her was hoping for him to surprise her.

"I'll take you on your words." Soulburner looked at his hand. He only has Hyena on his Field and Coyote in his hand. Only them alone won't be enough to summon a monster powerful enough to defeat Ryuki's Andrake.

"This Draw will determine everything." Soulburner muttered, holding the top of his Deck. He bet everything on this one Draw.

"My turn! Draw!" Soulburner looked at the card he drew. His eyes lit up upon seeing the Spell Card in his hand. He can do this.

"I activate Magic Card: Salamangreat Recurrence! I can target 2 Salamangreat monsters in my Graveyard with different names to add them to my hand." Soulburner added Meer and Falco back to his hand.

"From my hand, I activate Salamangreat Meer's effect! By sending a Salamangreat monster from my hand to the Graveyard, I can Special Summon Meer to my field!" Soulburner sent Salamangreat Falco from his hand to the Graveyard and then summoned Meer in Attack Position.

"I activate Salamangreat Falco's effect in my Graveyard! By returning a Salamangreat monster I control to my hand, I can Special Summon Falco to the field!" Soulburner returned Meer to his hand, replacing it with Falco.

"As Meer is added to my hand other than my normal draw, I activate its effect to Special Summon It!" He summoned Meer again back to his Field.

"This is the same move he did on his first turn!" Ai remembered the first move that Soulburner did in his previous turns.

"Is he going to summon Heatleo again?" Playmaker couldn't think of another way for Soulburner to repeat this move.

"But even if he summoned Heatleo, its ATK won't still be enough to deplete her LP." Ai said nervously. Due to Ryuki's Spell effect, Soulburner could only attack Andrake. Heatleo has higher ATK than Andrake, but Ryuki's LP is at 500. She'd only received 300 points damage and still have 200 LP left if Andrake is destroyed.

"No. I only have two copies of Heatleo and both of them are in my Graveyard, so I can't perform Reincarnation Link Summon like I did before." Soulburner revealed, dismissing Playmaker's guess. He wasn't bothered though. Because he has a better alternative.

"But, thanks to Salamangreat Recurrence, I can turn things around!" Soulburner smiled with anticipation as he took the last remaining card in his hand.

"From my hand, I summon Salamangreat Coyote!" Soulburner summoned the last monster in his hand, now making his hand completely empty.

Salamangreat Coyote (CYBERSE/FIRE/EFFECT/ATK: 1000/DEF: 200/LV: 3)

" *Now he has four monsters on his Field… Is he planning to… !"* Ryuki realized what Soulburner's intention.

"Appear, the circuit that changes the future!" Soulburner called forth the Link Portal.

"Arrowheads confirmed. The summoning condition is 2 FIRE Effect Monsters! I set Meer, Falco, Hyena, and Coyote on the Link Markers! Circuits combined!" He set Meer at the top-center arrow, Falco at the right arrow, Hyena at the bottom-center arrow, and Coyote at the left arrow.

"Link Summon! Appear, Link 4, Salamangreat Pyro Phoenix!" Soulburner summoned his Link 4 Link Monster in Attack Position in the Extra Monster Zone.

Salamangreat Pyro Phoenix (CYBERSE/FIRE/LINK/ATK: 2800/LNK: 4/LM: Top-Center, Right, Bottom-Center, Left)

"An ATK of 2800?!" Ryuki was surprised. She could still hold on until her next turn if Soulburner's monster has the same ATK around Heatleo's. But it's not possible against Pyro Phoenix with her LP only at 500.

"Battle! I attack Guardragon Andrake with Salamangreat Pyro Phoenix!" Soulburner declared his one last attack.

The crimson flames that served as Pyro Phoenix's wings turned bright blue as it heats up. Pyro Phoenix's cupped its hand, concentrating its energy into a sphere of blue flames between its hands. It then thrust its hands forward, shooting out a streaming, powerful blue flames in the form of a phoenix bird, burning down the dragon until nothing was left of it.

Ryuki fell on her knees as her ace dragon was destroyed and her remaining LP depleted to zero.

Ryuki LP: 500 = 0

That last move was beyond what she could calculate. However, despite her loss, she was satisfied with the result. He responded to all her attacks with equal strength. Even when he was driven to the corner, Soulburner's spirit didn't deter him in the slightest. If anything, his determination to win only grew stronger no matter how slim it is. He had proven not only his worth as a Duelist, but also his conviction and sincerity. There was nothing for her to doubt them anymore.

"You're amazing, Ryuki. That's a really fun Duel." Soulburner extended his hand for her.

"I could say the same thing to you." She accepted his hand, allowing him to help her back to her feet.

"I can feel your feelings from our Duel. I think I can trust you to watch over Holysaber. But that's just me. Holysaber is still the one to make the decision." She'll inform Holysaber that they are someone she's confident will watch his back, but she won't force Holysaber to accept their offer.

"I believe that's good enough."

Everyone was startled when Holysaber revealed himself, coming out from behind the wall where he was hiding.

"H-Holysaber! How did you get in here?! Since when?!" Ryuki asked.

"I made this program together with you. Making a program to penetrate it is a piece of cake. As to when, since you destroyed Soulburner's Heatleo the first time." Holysaber answered casually.

"I was wondering why your brother kept trying to stop me from meeting you. This is why." He sighed at Ryuki. After a while, he managed to distract Minoru with a new game he brought for him and used that opening to check on Kazue. Once he found the mail that he never wrote and sent to Playmaker, he realized what Kazue was doing and immediately followed her to LINK VRAINS.

"Sorry…" Ryuki apologized. She did feel guilty for doing this behind his back. She was ready to be scolded by him. Instead, she was given a pat on the shoulder.

"You don't need to explain. I appreciate that you're doing this for me. You've done enough. It's about time for me to make my decision." Holysaber briefly smiled at his childhood friend and then turned to Playmaker and the others.

"Have you decided then?" Playmaker asked.

"No. Not yet." Holysaber shook his head. Watching Ryuki's Duel against Soulburner, he thought he was starting to understand what he wanted to do and what he must do. To gain affirmation for this though, there is one thing that he believed he needed to do first.

"Before I'm making my decision, I think I also need to clarify with my own hands like Ryuki just did." Holysaber raised his Duel Disk, looking straight at Playmaker in the eyes.

"Playmaker, this time, would you please enlighten me with a Duel?"

NEXT CHAPTER:

Chapter 4 - Taking the First Step: Still wavering with his decision, Holysaber challenged Playmaker in hope of learning more about

Playmaker and helping him to finally make his decision. As both Holysaber and Playmaker clashed with their respective ace monsters, they began to reveal more about themselves.

ORIGINAL CARDS

Ryuki

Dragon Shield of the Egypt (Equip Spell) - You can equip this card to a Dragon-Type monster you control. Dragon-Type monster equipped with this card cannot be destroyed by Battle or card effects. Neither player takes any Battle Damage involving this card.

Contract with Dragon Lords (Spell) - You can activate this card by paying 2000 LP and then draw cards equal to the number of Dragon-Type monsters you control on the Field.

Dragon's Safe Haven (Field Spell) - Once per turn, you can send one card from your hand to the Graveyard to move a Dragon-Type Monster you control to an empty zone next to that monster.

Link Soul (Trap) - When a Link Monster on your Field is destroyed by a Battle or an effect, you can Special Summon one of its materials from your Graveyard to your Field. Your opponent can only attack the monster you summoned through this card's effect until your opponent's next End Phase.

Soulburner

Salamangreat Hyena (CYBERSE/FIRE/EFFECT/ATK: 1000/DEF: 400/LV: 4) - When your opponent activates an effect during your Battle Phase while you control a Salamangreat monster, you can negate that effect, but the Battle Phase also ends. When your Salamangreat Link Monster is destroyed by Battle or effect during Battle Phase, you can Special Summon this card and end the Battle Phase.

Flame Revival (Spell) - You can Special Summon 1 FIRE Monster from both player's Graveyard, and then draw 1 card.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

What do you think of Ryuki's debut Duel? I hope it's enjoyable enough. There's a slight change I made in monster's effect. For the result of the Duel, I was thinking whether to make Ryuki lose or the Duel ending up in a Draw. I have no intention to make Ryuki a weak or inexperience Duelist, but after considering some things, I deemed it's better to have the Duel ended with her lost. Plus, I also don't want to be biased too much in regard to my OCs.

The idea of combining the Hieroglyphic archetype with Guardragon archetype for Ryuki's deck was taken from my cousin's friend who is a *YGO* fan and once played with the combination of these two archetypes. Since I've decided to make Ryuki to be a dragon-theme character, I thought 'why not?' and went with this deck.

TRIVIA

- The kanji " " of Kento's name alternatively can be read as "Tsurugi". The word is used in the West to refer to a specific type of Japanese straight, double-edged sword used in antiquity (as opposed to curved, single-edged swords such as the katana). In Japanese the term tsurugi or ken is used as a term for all sorts of international long, double-edged swords.

- The idea of a robot that became container for Saint Kuriboh to move in the real world is based on Haro from Gundam franchise.

- Kento's uniform from his previous school, called gakuran, is the uniform for many middle-school and high-school boys in Japan. The colour is normally black, but some schools use navy blue.

Taking the First Step

RESPONSES TO REVIEW:

Thank you to ***tsukikami02, Hell Kaiser Younes, T.V. 2000, Ulrich362, HunterHQ*** for reading and reviewing the previous chapter.

Happy 7th Anniversary for *Yu-Gi-Oh! VRAINS* ! Time sure flies fast, it's already the seventh year ever since *VRAINS* was first aired. How I miss those times I excitedly wait for new episodes every week. It makes me want to rewatch the anime again from start to finish. But then, I decided to use the free times I managed to get to write new chapters. Thought it's a few days late from the exact date of the anniversary, I present you the 4th chapter of Divine Record to celebrate *VRAINS* ' 7th Anniversary!

Ulrich362: Don't worry, I'll make sure the girls would get their moments to shine eventually. And you'll learn more about Kento's best-friend (who was also Kazue's boyfriend) soon.

I hope you'll enjoy reading this chapter.

CHAPTER 4

Taking the First Step

Saisho no Ippo o Fumidasu

LINK VRAINS - Network

"Me? Dueling you?" Playmaker repeated questioningly.

"Yes. Like I said, I wish to ascertain something from you. Both as a Duelist and as someone who shared the same suffering as I am." Holysaber replied calmly.

Watching the Duel between Ryuki and Soulburner a while ago has shown him loud and clear that Soulburner's determination to see through the path he had chosen and his desire to help him was undoubtedly sincere. He is a kind and strong-willed person. It wasn't just a talk either. He has proven he has what it takes to overcome the obstacles that would come in his way. It made Holysaber start to think that if it's with them, perhaps he can do it.

However, he still doesn't know anything about Playmaker. What he knew about Playmaker was only from second-hand information he got from the media. Maybe he knew a bit about him as a Duelist from watching his Duels, but he knew nothing about Playmaker as a person. Playmaker was able to stand up and fight against Knights of Hanoi despite the wound in his heart. He wants to know how he's able to do it. He wants to know what drove him to get revenge instead of finding another way to move on.

"And I'm sure it's better for you to know my skill as a Duelist if you want us to fight together and do I have the strength to fight whatever is coming against us." Holysaber added. Just as he knew nothing about Playmaker, Playmaker, and Soulburner, also knew nothing about him. All they knew was he was also a victim of like them and that's it.

Playmaker didn't say anything in response, but he understood what Holysaber was trying to say. When he was battling against Knights of Hanoi, Playmaker never reached out to his fellow victims and asked them to fight together with him because he knew it wasn't an easy thing to confront their past trauma. The battle against Knights of Hanoi was a battle to the death, and he wouldn't want to subject them to another hardship that could potentially endanger their lives. He accepted Kusanagi's help only because he was as determined as he himself was while knowing the limit of working alone, and now Soulburner because he could tell Soulburner had set his mind to it.

It wasn't the same with Holysaber. The DIVINE-Attribute user is still uncertain what path he should take. It would be pointless if Holysaber himself doesn't have the resolve to confront his trauma. Even as a fellow victim, neither he nor Soulburner can, nor do they have the right to force Holysaber into helping them. Worsening Holysaber's condition is the last thing that Playmaker ever wants to happen. Even if Holysaber has the desire to move on and has the skill as a Duelist but is too weak-willed to see through his own choice, it's better not to involve him in this dangerous battle.

"I understand. I accept your challenge." Playmaker raised his Duel Disk, taking up Soulburner's spot while Holysaber did the same with Ryuki.

"Duel!"

Holysaber LP: 4000

Playmaker LP: 4000

"I'm taking the first turn. From my hand, I activate Field Spell: Mount Olympus." Holysaber set up his field. As he activated the Field Spell, their surroundings changed to that of a grassy field filled with clouds and white pillars in the shape of 12 Olympian Gods in Greek mythology.

"When this card is activated, I can add 1 Olympios Stratos Monster from my deck to my hand." Holysaber added a card to his hand. He then picked one of the cards he was holding in his hand.

"When I don't have any card on my Spell and Trap Zone, I can Special Summon Olympios Stratos - Archon from my hand." Holysaber Special Summoned Archon in Attack Position to the Main Monster Zone.

Olympios Stratos - Archon (CYBERSE/DIVINE/ATK: 200/DEF: 1000/LV: 2)

"From my hand, I summon Olympios Stratos - Kalimavkion." Holysaber summoned Kalimavkion normally in Attack Position to the zone next to Archon.

Olympios Stratos - Kalimavkion (CYBERSE/DIVINE/EFFECT/ATK: 500/DEF: 100/LV: 3)

"Come forth, the circuit that lights up the future!" Holysaber summoned the Link Portal on his field in front of him. He set Archon on the Bottom-Center Link Marker.

"Link Summon! Appear, Link 1, Olympios Stratos - Anthopolis!" Holysaber summoned a female humanoid monster with a short, violet hair with two long bangs framing her face and violet eyes. Her outfits consist mainly of shamrock green and pine green attire, that has silver and pink accents on her stomach and skirt respectively.

Olympios Stratos - Anthopolis (CYBERSE/DIVINE/ATK: 500/LNK: 1/LM: Bottom-Center)

"I activate Mount Olympus' second effect. Once per Turn, I can discard 1 card from my hand to Special Summon 1 Level 5 or lower Olympios Stratos monster from my Deck in Defense Position." Holysaber sent one card to the Graveyard and Special Summoned Diakonos in Defense Position to the zone pointed by Anthopolis right next to Kalimavkion.

Olympios Stratos - Diakonos (CYBERSE/DIVINE/EFFECT/ATK: 900/DEF: 1000/LV: 3)

"Once more, the circuit that lights up the future!" Holysaber opened the Link Portal for the second time.

"Arrowhead confirmed! The summoning condition is 2 effect monsters. I set Kalimavkion treated as two materials and Diakonos in the Link Markers! Circuit Combined!" Kalimavkion and Diakonos turned into hurricanes that went to the Bottom-Left marker, Top marker, and Right marker, respectively.

"Sacred sword that embodies hope. Descend from the heavenly sky and guide the tormented souls away from evil oppressors! Link Summon! Appear, Link 3, Olympios Stratos - Elpizo Harpe!" Holysaber summoned his ace monster to the zone pointed by Anthopolis.

Olympios Stratos - Elpizo Harpe (CYBERSE/DIVINE/LINK/ATK: 2300/LNK: 3/LM: Bottom-Left, Top-Center, Right)

"I end my Turn." Holysaber concluded.

"This feels nostalgic. It's been years since I last saw that monster." Flame mused. Five years passed since he had last seen Divine Ignis and several of his monsters. Now, seeing his friend's ace monster after what felt like forever, it brought up a pleasant familiar feeling that reminded him of his old days with the Divine Ignis.

"He brought out his ace monster right off the bat!" Ai exclaimed. Not that it surprised him that much. He had a feeling that monster would appear sooner or later.

"Any data on the deck he is using? What's his playstyle?" Playmaker asked his A.I. partner.

A Duelist's playstyle depends on the deck they are using. Furthermore, the deck that Holysaber is using consists of DIVINE Attribute cards, an attribute that nobody in the world has but Holysaber and Divine Ignis alone. According to the story before, it was only four days ago that Holysaber gained that deck. Despite that, Ai said that Holysaber showed quick adaptability of using the deck, even defeating Blood Shepherd who is an infamous bounty hunter in LINK VRAINS, meaning he is a skilled Duelist. A skilled Duelist using never-before-seen-Attribute deck would make a difficult opponent. Knowing even a little about the deck would help to form a countermeasure.

"As far as I remembered, during our days in the Cyberse World, Divine Ignis never stick to a single playstyle. He liked to try out

various kinds of strategy." Ai recalled how Divine Ignis once told him that Duelists shouldn't be bogged down by one possibility alone. Duelists should continue striving to improve themselves by trying out other possibilities. And those experiences would help them grow. The Dark Ignis also remembered clearly how his best friend looked happy whenever he had his 'Dueling eureka' moments.

"And I've only seen Holysaber Dueled once. There's nothing much I can say about him other than from that one Duel." The only thing that Ai was sure of was that Holysaber is good at Dueling. No amateur could use Divine Ignis' deck so efficiently on the first try. After they parted ways, it's possible that Holysaber had studied the deck enough to form his own playstyle different from what he knew from Divine Ignis.

"One thing that was consistent though, was that whenever their LP is low, they would take advantage of it to reinforce their field to overpower their opponent. That's especially true for Elpizo Harpe. It has the effect of gaining an ATK equal to the difference between the ATK of the monster pointed by its Link Arrow and the player's current LP. Worse, after it inflicts battle damage, it can inflict damage to the opponent equal to the ATK of a monster pointed by its Link Arrow." Ai explained. Elpizo Harpe has always been Divine Ignis' ace monster and his main arsenal for as far as Ai remembered. The guy never stopped being proud of one of his most favorite monsters. And he was justified to be proud of it, because Elpizo Harpe had proven itself to be a formidable monster for whoever fighting against it. No matter how different Divine Ignis and Holysaber were, their usage of Elpizo Harpe would still be the same.

"Then we must watch out for that Link Monster and deplete his LP in one go." Playmaker carefully observed Holysaber's field.

A Link 3 Link Monster with an effect that can increase ATK depending on the difference between the player's LP and monster pointed by its Link Arrow. A Link 1 Monster with unknown effect with its Link Arrow co-linked with Elpizo Harpe's. And lastly, only one card in Holysaber's hand. Taking Elpizo Harpe's effect into consideration,

the difference between Holysaber's current LP and Anthopolis' ATK, Elpizo Harpe will gain 3500 ATK, making its ATK 5800 when its effect is activated. He has three options in this situation so far: destroy Anthopolis to prevent Elpizo Harpe from increasing its ATK, overpowering Elpizo Harpe's ATK when its effect is activated, or negating Elpizo Harpe's effect. But Anthopolis may have an effect that he doesn't know.

" *I'll have to do that then."* Playmaker made his decision before starting his Draw Phase.

"My turn. As I control no monsters, I can Special Summon Linkslayer to my field." Playmaker summoned Linkslayer in Attack Position to the Main Monster Zone.

Linkslayer (CYBERSE/EARTH/EFFECT/ATK: 2000/DEF: 600/LV: 5)

"As I control a Cyberse Monster, I can Special Summon Backup Secretary from my hand." Playmaker Special Summoned Backup Secretary next to Linkslayer in Attack Position.

Backup Secretary (CYBERSE/LIGHT/EFFECT/ATK: 1200/DEF: 800/LV: 3)

"And then from my hand, I summon Stack Reviver." Playmaker summoned Stack Reviver normally from his hand to the zone next to Backup Secretary, also in Attack Position.

Stack Reviver (CYBERSE/DARK/EFFECT/ATK: 100/ DEF: 600/LV: 2)

"Appear! The circuit that leads to the future!" Playmaker summoned the Link Portal to his field.

"Arrowheads confirmed. The summoning condition is at least 2 Cyberse monsters. I set Linkslayer, Stack Reviver, and Backup Secretary on the Link Markers! Circuit combined!" Playmaker set

Linkslayer to the top-center arrow, Stack Reviver to the bottom-center arrow, and Backup Secretary to the bottom-right arrow.

"Link Summon! Appear, Link 3, Encode Talker!" Playmaker summoned Encode Talker to the Extra Monster Zone.

Encode Talker (CYBERSE/LINK/LIGHT/LNK: 3/ATK: 2300/LM: Top-Center, Bottom-Center, Bottom-Right)

"I activate Stack Reviver's effect from my Graveyard! When this card is used to Link Summon, I can Special Summon Level 4 or lower Cyberse Monster from the Graveyad!" Playmaker resurrected Backup Secretary in Attack Position.

"Battle! I attack Elpizo Harpe with Backup Secretary!" Playmaker declared his Battle Phase, surprising everyone.

"Why is Playmaker attacking with Backup Secretary that has lower ATK than Elpizo Harpe?" Soulburner exclaimed in confusion.

"It's already strange that he chose Elpizo Harpe instead of Anthopolis as his target." Flame was also as confused as his partner, "Not to mention, Elpizo Harpe has quite a dangerous effect."

"I activate Elpizo Harpe's effect! When this card points to a monster, it gains ATK equals to the difference between my LP and that monster's ATK!" Holysaber activated his ace's effect. His current LP is still at 4000 while Anthopolis has 500 ATK, so there's a 3500-point difference between them. That point is added to Elpizo Harpe.

Elpizo Harpe ATK: 2300 = 5700

5700 against 1200. If this attack hits, Backup Secretary will be destroyed, and Playmaker will receive 4500, which would end with his loss. However, Holysaber didn't buy that. He doubted Playmaker chose Backup Secretary without a plan. And he was right.

"I activate Encode Talker's effect! Once per turn, if the monster Encode Talker points to battles an opponent's monster with higher ATK, I can make that monster unable to be destroyed by Battle and I take no Battle Damage from that battle!" Playmaker declared.

Backup Secretary used her cloak to defend from Elpizo Harpe's sword before retreating to Playmaker's field.

"Also, after the damage calculation, Encode Talker or 1 monster it points to gains ATK equal to the current ATK of that opponent's monster until the end of this turn!" Playmaker revealed. Naturally, he chose Encode Talker, increasing its ATK equals to Elpizo Harpe's current ATK, which is 5700.

"What?!" Holysaber gasped as he watched Encode Talker power up.

Encode Talker ATK: 2300 = 8000

"Next, I attack Anthopolis with Encode Talker!" Playmaker declared his second attack.

Holysaber and everyone else understood now. Playmaker was aiming to increase Encode Talker's ATK all along to finish him in one attack using the Code Talker monster. With such a high ATK, Holysaber wouldn't be able to survive the attack.

At least, he wouldn't be able to if not for Anthopolis effect.

"I activate Anthopolis' effect! When this card points to a monster, my opponent can only target that monster for an attack!" Holysaber declared. Anthopolis' Link Arrow points to Elpizo Harpe, forcing Encode Talker to switch its target to Elpizo Harpe instead.

"Also, when Anthopolis is co-linked with another DIVINE-Attribute Link Monster, Anthopolis and that monster cannot be destroyed by Battle and the damage is halved!" Holysaber added. Elpizo Harpe blocks Encode Talker's shield with the back of its sword, deflecting the opposing Link Monster back.

Holysaber LP: 4000 = 2850

"He managed to avoid OTK without losing his monsters and minimize the damage. He's better than I imagined." Flame mused. Though he had heard about Holysaber from Ai, the Dark Ignis sometimes has the tendency to exaggerate his story, so Flame only half-believed his story. Now, Flame must admit that Ai most likely was right about Holysaber.

"I activate Magic Card: Cyberse Cache. If I control a Cyberse Monster whose current ATK is different from its original ATK, I draw 2 cards." As his Battle Phase ended, Playmaker could activate his Magic Card. With Elpizo Harpe's ATK being changed from its original ATK, Playmaker was allowed to draw 2 cards from his deck.

"I set a card and end my turn." Playmaker concluded. As his turn ended, Encode Talker's ATK also returned to normal.

Encode Talker ATK: 8000 = 2300

"My turn. Draw." Holysaber began his Draw Phase. Looking at the card, he immediately activated it.

"From my hand, I activate Magic Card: Horn of Summoning Kuriboh. I can take 1 Kuriboh Monster from my deck, and either add it to my hand or Special Summon it." Holysaber decided to Special Summon Saint Kuriboh from his deck to the zone pointed by Elpizo Harpe's right-arrow in Attack Position.

Saint Kuriboh (CYBERSE/DIVINE/EFFECT/ATK: 300/DEF: 200/LV: 1)

"Appear, the circuit that lights up the future!" Holysaber opened the Link Portal for the third time, setting Anthopolis on the Bottom-Right Arrow of the Link Markers.

"Link Summon! Appear, Link 1, Olympios Stratos - Gondolieris!" Holysaber summoned a female humanoid monster with a pair of

green eyes. Her white hair is cut short at the back with two long ponytails on the sides of her head held together by blue clasps. She was wearing a white and blue narrow profile dress that is split up the calf with black and silver edges, black and white lace trimmings and exposed shoulders. Her hat is of a round shape and sits on the back of her head decorated with a blue ribbon. She was riding on top of a white gondola while holding a white swing.

Olympios Stratos - Gondolieris (CYBERSE/DIVINE/LINK/ATK: 600/LM: Bottom-Right/LNK: 1)

"At this moment, Saint Kuriboh's effect activates. As long as this card is pointed by an Olympios Stratos Link Monster, I'll recover 200 LP each time both players perform Link Summon." Because Saint Kuriboh is pointed by Elpizo Harpe's Right-Arrow and Gondolieris' Bottom-Right Arrow, Holysaber recovered 200 LP.

Holysaber LP: 2850 = 3050

"It's not much but he still recovered his LP. And from now on, as long as Saint Kuriboh is on the Field while pointed by an Olympios Stratos Link Monster, Holysaber's LP will continue to increase each time both him and Playmaker performed Link Summon." Soulburner commented. Though 200 points is not a big number, doing it repeatedly would gradually grow that number, especially if the deck is dependent on Link Summoning.

" *Based on the Duels that we managed to watch, Playmaker's main strategy involves using methodically calculated moves to overwhelm his opponent with Link Monsters. If he's still using the same strategy, then he'll continuously summon Link Monsters to set up a bigger combo."* Ryuki remembered all Playmaker's Duels that she and Holysaber watched on TV. Learning from those Duels, Holysaber came up with this move as a counter against Playmaker's Link Summoning.

"Never thought I'm going against you, Saint Kuriboh." Ai said with a mixed emotions as he saw the said monster on the other side of the

field.

"You never Dueled Divine Ignis?" Playmaker asked.

"Only once in a while. Us, Ignis, have shown some of our cards to each other, but the thought of Dueling against one another never crossed our minds that much because we were too busy with our duties to take care of our home. But who knows, maybe the other Ignis have Dueled against each other without me knowing." Ai denied. They have only ever discussed various kinds of cards and strategies to be used in their Duel without ever applying it directly themselves in a real Duel.

"Busy my butt, you always slacked off and made us do all the work. I always felt sorry for Water Ignis and Divine Ignis who never stopped trying to get you to work." Flame retorted.

"S-shut up! I still remember certain things about Divine Ignis' deck and strategies! That's all that matters now!" Ai retorted back with a huff.

"Even so, was it really worth it for him to remove Anthopolis that can prevent destruction and halve the damage just to summon a new monster?" Playmaker completely ignored the exchange between Ai and Flame, focusing on the new Link Monster that Holysaber summoned that replaced Anthopolis.

"Divine Ignis wouldn't make a wasteful move. He is not the Divine Ignis, but I have this strong feeling that he is not doing this without consideration." Ai warned Playmaker. He wondered about this himself. This person in front of him is not his best friend that he knew. For some reason, however, something inside him said that this person could use the deck to its fullest capabilities like Divine Ignis. Is it because Holysaber is Divine Ignis' Origin? Or is it because of Saint Kuriboh's confidence in choosing it as its master?

"Battle! I attack with Gondolieris!" Holysaber declared his Battle Phase using his newly summoned Link Monster.

"Huh? Now it's Holysaber's turn to attack Playmaker's higher ATK monster with lower ATK monster." Soulburner blinked in surprise.

"Gondolieris can only attack monster with the highest ATK on the field." Holysaber further revealed, confusing them even more.

"A low ATK monster attacking a monster with the highest ATK?! What kind of suicidal effect is that?!" Ai yelled in disbelief. Why did Divine Ignis include such a monster on his deck?

"At this moment, I activate Gondolieris' effect! When this card is Link Summoned using a Link Monster as its material, once per turn, it cannot be destroyed by Battle and any damage is inflicted to my opponent instead!" Holysaber declared.

"Say what?!" Ai looked dumbstruck at Gondolieris.

Gondolieris twirling her swing in circular motion as clear watery substances are formed at the tip of the swing. Gondolieris then raises her swing above, turning all the watery substances into the shape of a whale. She swings it down, directing the whale towards Encode Talker. The Code Talker monster blocks the whale's tackle, but it opens its mouth and unleashes a sound wave that causes Playmaker to skid back.

Playmaker LP: 4000 = 2300

"I activate Trap Card: Reflect Destruction! When my monster couldn't destroy my opponent's monster by Battle, I can destroy another monster my opponent controls and decrease the ATK of the monster that wasn't destroyed equal to the ATK of the destroyed monster!" Holysaber opened his Trap. As Encode Talker was not destroyed, Gondolieris uses her swing to strike down Backup Secretary, destroying the monster, and Encode Talker's ATK is weakened equal to Backup Secretary's ATK.

Encode Talker ATK: 2300 = 1100

"Next, I attack Encode Talker with Elpizo Harpe!" Holysaber declared his second attack. He also activated Elpizo Harpe's effect, increasing his ATK equal to the difference between Holysaber's own LP and ATK of a monster pointed by Elpizo Harpe's Link Arrow. Holysaber's current LP is at 3050 while Saint Kuriboh's ATK is at 300, so Elpizo Harpe received 2750 points power up.

Olympios Stratos - Elpizo Harpe ATK: 2300 = 5050

Elpizo Harpe jumps forward with his sword raised, ready to swing it down at the weakened Encode Talker. If the attack connects, Playmaker won't survive, and he has no intention to let that attack hit his Link Monster.

"Trap Card: Overload Anchor!" Playmaker countered by opening his own Trap Card.

"When my opponent's monster declares an attack while I control 1 Link Monster and no other monster, I can make the monster I control unable to be destroyed by Battle and halve any Battle Damage I take from that Battle, and then end the Battle Phase!" Playmaker declared.

Encode Talker once again blocks the attack coming with its shield, it keeps standing on its spot even when Elpizo Harpe tries to push through his sword until Encode Talker finally pushes the Olympios Stratos Link Monster back to his field.

Playmaker LP: 2300 = 325

"Also, the ATK of all Link Monsters my opponent controls become half of their current ATK until my opponent's next Standby Phase." Playmaker added, halving the ATKs of both of Holysaber's Link Monsters.

Olympios Stratos - Elpizo Harpe ATK: 2300 = 1150

Olympios Stratos - Gondolieris ATK: 600 = 300

"I activate Elpizo Harpe's additional effect! After this card inflicts Battle Damage, I can inflict damage to my opponent equal to the ATK of a monster pointed by this card's Link Arrow!" Holysaber countered, choosing Gondolieris who is pointed by his top-center Link Arrow.

"I activate Overload Anchor's additional effect! When I control exactly 1 monster on the field and my opponent inflicts damage to me, I can banish this card from the Graveyard, and recover my LP equal to the damage I'm supposed to take!

Elpizo Harpe swings his sword, creating a slash of energy that hits Playmaker with 300 damage, but the slash instead dispersed, covering Playmaker and converted into LP for him.

Playmaker LP: 325 = 625

"Phew! That was close!" Ai sighed in relief.

"Playmaker, let me ask you this: why did you decide to confront your life by fighting against Knights of Hanoi despite knowing the danger?" Holysaber asked. He could've ended up worse than how they were ten years ago, yet he still chose the path of vengeance. How did he gain the courage to take that path to begin with? Why did he decide to regain what he lost instead of starting anew?

Playmaker paused. This situation reminded him of when he infiltrated SOL Technologies' data bank and was confronted by Akira. The difference this time was Akira was an outsider who, despite having good intentions in asking him to stop his revenge, ultimately knew nothing about his feelings. Holysaber, on the other hand, is someone who fully understood his pain and won't judge him for the path he had taken. Holysaber is still at loss, and he is hoping that Playmaker can help him find the answer he is seeking, hence, the question.

"After that incident, my life was torn apart. Just like you and Soulburner did. I have no future to talk about with my friends or

irreplaceable moments." Playmaker never thought he would repeat the story he told Akira, Ghost Girl, and Blue Angel like this. Before, telling this story brought up unpleasant bitterness. Now, there was only clarity.

"To heal the wounds in my heart, I received treatment for years. I also tried hard to forget that incident. But no matter how much time passed, I couldn't forget. Those horrible memories were burned into my eyes, feasting on my heart. It became my flash and blood that I couldn't dig out." Playmaker can tell from Holysaber's pained expression, the way his gaze is looking at him like he is seeing his own reflection in a mirror, that Holysaber knows what he is talking about. It was something Holysaber also experienced and still does to this day after all.

"When I realized that, I decided to face my own destiny. I believe that fighting against Knights of Hanoi was something I was destined to do to move forward." Playmaker still remembers that day when he finally made up his mind.

The culprit of the incident was never captured, and the thought of the culprit still out there walking freely made his stomach curl. Then, he heard some bits related to the incident here and there, which intensified the memories of those days, including about a certain person who continued to encourage him during his captivity. It incited his curiosity about what happened to that person. The things he heard coupled with his nightmares, Playmaker came to conclusion that fate was leading him to them. He could never cut his ties to that incident by turning his back on it. There was only one solution to it. And that was his destiny.

"Destiny, you say…" Holysaber murmured. He doesn't know how to make that out. It never crossed his mind about his own destiny. Does meeting the masked Duelist that led him to his current situation with Playmaker is also part of his destiny? Is it also his destiny to fight, to confront his past for him to let it go completely?

"Is there really no other way than fighting for you to move on?" Holysaber asked again.

"For me, there is no other path. Of course, it doesn't mean that the others are the same. Maybe among the victims out there, there is one who can move on without having to fight like I did." After his encounter against Specter, Playmaker had learned not to assume that the other victims would think exactly the same way as he is. He, Soulburner, Holysaber, and Kusanagi's younger brother experienced the same pain and trauma, but that doesn't mean the path they take to let go of the past must also be the same. It's possible that the remaining two victims other than them have recovered and are now living peacefully.

From Playmaker's observation, Holysaber is faring better than he did before and Kusanagi's younger brother. His assumption is it was thanks to Ryuki's dedicated company. Dueling him right now, Holysaber doesn't show any hint of discomfort in his Dueling, which gives Playmaker the impression that he can Duel but not enjoying it like him or he had rediscovered his love for Dueling like Soulburner does. At least, that's how it looks on the outside. However, Ryuki's words convinced him there is still something they haven't told them yet. And that is what prevented Holysaber from taking a step to move on.

"I activate Reflect Destruction's second effect! At the end of the Battle Phase, by banishing this card from my Graveyard, I can Special Summon a Level 5 or lower monster from my Deck but that monster will be destroyed at the end of my next End Phase." Holysaber banished his Trap Card and then picked Olympia Stratos - Polydefki to be summoned to his field.

Olympios Stratos - Polydefki (CYBERSE/DIVINE/PENDULUM/EFFECT/ATK: 1500/DEF: 2000/ LV: 5/PS: 7)

"I end my turn." Holysaber concluded.

"My turn. From my hand, I summon Draconnet." Playmaker summoned Draconnet in Attack Position.

Draconnet (CYBERSE/DARK/EFFECT/ATK: 1400/DEF: 1200/LV: 3)

"When Draconnet is Normal Summoned, I can Special Summon 1 Level 2 or lower Normal Monster from my Deck in Defense Position." Playmaker summoned Bitron in Defense Position next to Draconnet.

Bitron (CYBERSE/NORMAL/EARTH/ATK: 200/DEF: 200/LV: 2)

"I activate Magic Card: Link Back. I target 1 Link Monster in my Extra Monster Zone to move it to the Main Monster Zone it points to, then I send cards from the top of my deck to the Graveyard equal to the targeted monster's Link Rating." Playmaker chose Encode Talker, moving it to the zone pointed by its bottom-right arrow and then sending 3 cards from his deck to his Graveyard.

"Appear, the circuit that leads to the future!" Playmaker set Bitron to the bottom-center arrow of the Link Marker.

"Link Summon! Appear, Link 1, Link Spider!" He summoned Link Spider to the Extra Monster Zone.

Link Spider (CYBERSE/LINK/EARTH/ATK: 1000/LNK: 1/LM: Bottom-Center)

As Playmaker performed Link Summon, Saint Kuriboh's effect is activated, increasing Holysaber's LP by 200.

Holysaber LP: 3050 = 3250

"I activate Link Spider's effect! Once per turn, I can Special Summon 1 Level 4 or lower monster from my hand to the zone this card points to!" Playmaker summoned Clock Wyvern in Attack Position to the Main Monster Zone pointed by Link Spider's bottom-center Link Arrow.

Clock Wyvern (CYBERSE/EFECT/WIND/ATK: 1800/DEF: 1000/LV: 4)

"When Clock Wyvern is Normal or Special Summoned, I can halve its ATK and Special Summon Clock Token." Playmaker halved Clock Wyvern's ATK.

Clock Wyvern ATK: 1800 = 900

Following the effect, Playmaker then also summoned a single Clock Token in Attack Position to the Main Monster Zone next to Clock Wyvern.

Clock Token (CYBERSE/WIND/ATK: 0/DEF: 0/LV: 1)

"Appear once more! The circuit that leads to the future!" Playmaker opened the Link Portal again.

"Arrowheads confirmed. The summoning condition is at least 2 Monsters. I set Link 3 Encode Talker and Link 1 Link Spider in the Link Markers. Circuit combined!" Playmaker set Encode Talker to the left, top-center, and right Link Arrows, while he set Link Spider to the bottom-center Link Arrow.

"Link Summon! Appear, Link 4, Firewall Dragon!" Playmaker summoned his ace monster to the Extra Monster Zone.

Firewall Dragon (CYBERSE/LINK/LIGHT/ATK: 2500/LNK: 4/LM: Left, Top-Center, Right, Bottom-Center)

As Playmaker performed Link Summon again, Saint Kuriboh's effect increases Holysaber's LP by 200.

Holysaber LP: 3250= 3450

"No, I'm not done yet! Once more, the circuit that guides the future!" Playmaker opened the Link Portal for the third time.

"Arrowhead confirmed. The summoning condition is 2 or more Effect monsters! I set Draconnet, Clock Wyvern, and Clock Token on the Link Markers! Circuit combined!" Playmaker set Draconnet to the bottom-left arrow, Clock Wyvern to the top-center arrow, and Clock Token to the bottom-right arrow of the Link Marker.

"Link Summon! Appear, Link 3, Decode Talker!" Playmaker summoned his first ace monster to the zone pointed by Firewall Dragon's bottom-center Link Arrow.

Decode Talker (CYBERSE/LINK/DARK/ATK: 2300/LNK: 3/LM: Bottom-Left, Top-Center, Bottom-Right)

"He brought out his two ace monsters in one turn?!" Holysaber exclaimed.

Due to Saint Kuriboh's effect, Holysaber's LP once again increased by 200.

Holysaber LP: 3450 = 3650

"I activate Firewall Dragon's effect! Once, while face-up on the field, I can target monsters on the field or Graveyard up to the number of monsters co-linked with this card and return them to the hand!" As Firewall Dragon is co-linked with Decode Talker, Playmaker chooses to return Elpizo Harpe.

Firewall Dragon unleashed a stream of blue digital energy that strikes the DIVINE-Attribute Link Monster. Elpizo Harpe's body disintegrated, diseappearing from the Field. Since Elpizo Harpe is an Extra Deck monster, it returns to Extra Deck instead of hand.

" *Since it's not destruction, Saint Kuriboh's effect won't work."* Holysaber clicked his tongue.

"Battle! I attack Olympios Stratos - Gondolieris with Firewall Dragon!" Playmaker declared his Battle Phase.

The blue lines on Firewall Dragon's body turns red in color. Its wings divide into six, forming five electrical circular energies that charge up the dragon's power into one point.

"When Saint Kuriboh is on the Field, all DIVINE Attribute monsters cannot be destroyed by Battle or Card effect!" Holysaber declared. Saint Kuriboh's halo shines, forming up barriers around Gondolieris and Polydefki.

"But you still take damage!" Playmaker stated.

Firewall Dragon shoots a stream of red energy that strikes Gondolieris, but the DIVINE-Attribute monster is protected by Saint Kuriboh's barrier, preventing her from being destroyed.

Holysaber LP: 3650 = 1750

"Next, I attack Saint Kuriboh with Decode Talker!" Playmaker continues the attack, now choosing Saint Kuriboh as his target.

"At this moment, I activate Decode Talker's effect! This card gains 500 ATK for each monster pointed by its Link Arrow! Power Integration!" Playmaker declared. Decode Talker's top-center Link Arrow is pointed to Firewall Dragon, giving it a 500-point power up.

Decode Talker ATK: 2300 = 2800

"I activate Polydefki's Monster Effect! While this card is in the Monster Zone, and another monster I control in the Monster Zone is targeted for an attack, I can change the target to this card instead!" Holysaber countered.

Polydefki quickly placed himself in front of Saint Kuriboh, protecting the little monster from Decode Talker's sword slash. And thanks to Saint Kuriboh's effect, he was protected by its barrier in turn, preventing his destruction.

Holysaber LP: 1750 = 450

"After Polydefki's activates this effect, it's placed in my Spell & Trap Zone as Pendulum Scale and monster who was originally targeted for the attack cannot be targeted until my opponent's next End Phase." Holysaber quickly placed Polydefki to the right side of the Spell and Trap Zone, forming a Pendulum Scale of 7.

"A Pendulum Monster?" Playmaker blinked. This was the first time he ever encountered someone who is using Pendulum Monster.

"It's not common to use Pendulum Monsters because Pendulum Monsters gives restriction to the number of Spell & Trap Zone, especially in Speed Duel. But Divine Ignis never cared about that and believed with the right strategy, Pendulum Monsters can make a great ally in Duel." Ai explained. During one of his trips to the outside world years ago, Divine Ignis told him that he didn't see many people using Pendulum Summoning and Pendulum Monsters. He felt it was a waste not to try utilizing them. It didn't take a second thought for Divine Ignis to learn Pendulum mechanics right then.

"True. Pendulum Monsters can still be useful in some ways." Playmaker never thought of using Pendulum cards before because he is already confident and comfortable enough with his current deck. But it won't hurt to learn more about Pendulum cards.

"I end my turn." Playmaker carefully observes Holysaber now that he has ended his turn.

Just as he is wondering what his opponent is going to do, however, Playmaker notices something is amiss. Holysaber is frozen stiff. He's not moving, not starting his turn. He's not even showing the slightest bit of movement to start his Draw Phase. He keeps his arms slump on his sides. And what bothers him the most, Holysaber looks unmistakably pale.

"Hey, something looks wrong with Holysaber." Soulburner said with concern for the Olympios Stratos user.

"He looks sick." Flame also grows concerned as Holysaber's face becomes paler.

"Again… ! Holysaber!" Ryuki rushes to her childhood friend. She holds his arm, holding a firm grip to snap him out from his mental onslaught.

"Kuri!" Saint Kuriboh also rushes to its master, holding his other arm.

"What? Did something happen to him?" Soulburner starts worrying now. For Ryuki went as far as rushing to Holysaber like that, this is not a trivial problem. Ryuki also said that this happened 'again', meaning this is not the first time.

"Looks like this is something serious." Playmaker couldn't be careless about the Duel now and ready to call it off if necessary as it appears Holysaber is not in the condition to fight.

"It's the same as back then." Ai said.

"What do you mean?" Playmaker asked his partner before he could call off the Duel.

"It was like this too. When Holysaber Dueled that masked guy, he suddenly became like this. It was only until Ryuki called him out that he snapped back from it." Ai recalled that moment when Holysaber was in this condition during the Duel against the unknown masked Duelist. His condition during that Duel was even worse as he even fell on his knees while holding his own trembling body.

Playmaker gasps softly as he remembers what Ryuki said in her Duel against Soulburner. She said she wanted to make sure if they had what it takes to support Holysaber, that Holysaber's life was on the line. Also, the look of horror in Holysaber's face is the look that is all too familiar for Playmaker. He used to have that look on his face too, after all.

"Ryuki, is this what you meant by supporting Holysaber?" Playmaker addressed the Dragon-Type user who is still holding Holysaber.

Ryuki opens her mouth to say something, but Holysaber holds her shoulder, stopping her.

"I'm sorry that you must see me like this." Holysaber steadied himself, his body no longer frozen, but his face is still pale. Now that it comes to this, he can't hide it anymore, "Playmaker, Soulburner, you know how every time we lost in a Duel when were trapped inside that room meant being electrocuted and not being given any food."

Playmaker and Soulburner stiffened at the reminder. There's no way they could forget those days. How many times they've lost and suffered from electrocution that forced them to Duel again with the aim to win while enduring the pain and hunger.

"Even now, those memories won't go away." Holysaber smiles sadly when he said so, "Every time I am cornered, thinking that I'm going to lose, my mind automatically remembers those days whenever I lost and got electrocuted. When that happened, I can't think straight. My mind and body are filled with nothing but fear. Just like now."

Holysaber looks at his own hands and finds them still trembling, as if he is already being electrocuted.

"My mind understands that even if I lose against you here, you won't hurt me. I won't be electrocuted like I did back then. But those memories keep coming. It won't let me go." Just as Playmaker said, that incident had become a part of him that it almost like it was his own flesh.

"I somehow managed this far thanks to Ryuki and Saint Kuriboh. But I'm aware that I can't keep being like this. There's no guarantee that the next time they can snap me out of it." It wasn't like this was the first time he attempted to detach himself from his past. He had tried several times to overcome it alone, but in the end, his family or friends always came to his rescue before he could try to kill himself.

"It's shameful for me to admit, I'm always doubting myself that I can move on. I'm not sure I can be as strong as you and Soulburner to face my destiny." Holysaber is always ashamed of himself for always troubling his family and friends because of his incompetence, because of his inability to let go of his past. If only he is strong enough, he won't need to bother them with his problem.

"It's not because I believed I was strong that I could fight against Knights of Hanoi. Rather, I believed fighting was the only choice that I have for me to move forward." Playmaker replied. This surprised Holysaber and the others, but they didn't say anything and let Playmaker continue to speak.

"I managed to defeat the Hanoi, fulfilled my revenge, and finally gained closure to my past. However, I realized along the way, that was only possible because I wasn't alone." Playmaker looks at Holysaber straight in the eyes, reflecting his sincerity and honesty.

The moment he decided to pick up his deck and face his destiny, Playmaker distanced himself from his family, moving out to live alone in Den City. The more he investigated the Lost Incident, the more he learned how dangerous the path he's taking. Because of this danger, he believed that he must not involve anyone else. His vengeance is his alone to bear. He must see through this alone without dragging anybody to his battle to the death.

However, he then met Kusanagi, whose brother was also the victim of the incident. Knowing there was someone other than him investigating that incident gave him a sense of kinship. Kusanagi made him realize that there was a limit to what he could do alone, and to an extent he could share what he felt to him that he couldn't to anyone because they were involved in the Lost Incident. Kusanagi served as his shield since they first formed their partnership.

Then, after Kusanagi, he met Ai, the A.I. based on him, born from the Lost Incident. Though initially they were only using each other, Playmaker acknowledged that Ai had helped him more than he imagined. His Skill, Storm Access, was a Skill that he gained from Ai.

During his Duels against Revolver, Ai saved him, giving him the encouragement that he needed to continue fighting even when the odds were against him, helping him realize what he must do. Now, again, Ai is helping him to fight new opponents.

Not just the two of them. Blue Angel, Go Onizuka, Akira, and Ghost Girl also helped him in his battle. If it weren't for them, he would never learn about the incident let alone stopping Knights of Hanoi's plan. He wouldn't be standing here right now if not for their help.

"Depending on others is not always a bad thing. You don't need to feel ashamed relying on your friends to help you when you are at your lowest. Knowing that we have people who support us, that we are not alone, we gradually can see the path towards the future, walking alongside them." Playmaker was able to see new possibilities that he couldn't see before when he was alone thanks to the new connections he had formed.

"Holysaber, I'm not telling you that you should join us. Our battle ahead would be dangerous and will come with risks. However, if you do decide to join us, then I am willing to support you until you can finally break free from that nightmare. If I can do it, then I am sure that you can do the same." Forming connection, depending on someone doesn't mean dragging them down together. Troubles are inevitable when one interacts with other people, be they related by blood or not, but even so, we want to stand side by side and support each other. That's what Playmaker had learned.

Holysaber stares hard at Playmaker's sincere smile.

That smile, those words, they are such a nostalgic feeling.

At that moment, Playmaker's form overlapped with that of his best friend.

" *No worries. I'll always be there to support you until you can finally break free from that nightmare."*

That's right.

Didn't he always make himself remember his best friend and Kazue to calm himself every time his suicidal urges encroached upon him? That time too, against the masked Duelist, he was only able to stand up again because he wanted to protect Kazue. He had thought that if he wanted to eliminate that nightmare from him for good, he mustn't rely on Kazue or anyone else because it was his own problem, and for fear he'd grow to be overly dependent on them and drag them down with him.

But that was the wrong way of thinking. That was not different from isolating himself. He wouldn't be standing here right now if not for Kazue stopping his attempts for all these years. He wouldn't be alive long enough to meet his best friend had he died back then. His family and friends cared for him. It must have hurt them to see him suffering. He shouldn't be thinking of overcoming his trauma by pushing away his loved ones, it is precisely because he is hurting that he should open to them, finding a way to solve it together, so they can be happy together.

" *I'm not alone."*

Holysaber clutched his chest briefly before letting go, once again standing up straight.

" *I'm not just fighting for my own survival like back then."*

He smiles softly at Ryuki and Saint Kuriboh, silently telling them that he is fine now.

" *I'm fighting for the people who are precious to me."*

Seeing the resolution in Holysaber's eyes, Ryuki and Saint Kuriboh let go of him, returning to their own positions, knowing that now the Duel will continue.

" *I'm fighting so I can live together with them."*

Instead of letting those memories fuel his urge to die, he should use those memories to remind himself of his loved ones who are waiting for him, making it a motivation that he mustn't die because he must return to their side. Facing his life in order to move on is not only for his own sake, but also for the sake of his loved ones who are waiting for him.

" *That's why, I mustn't give up."*

"My turn!" Holysaber finally started his Draw Phase.

"With Scale 2 Olympios Stratos - Kastora, I set the Pendulum Scale!" Holysaber set Kastora to the Spell & Trap Zone, making the Pendulum Scale from 2 to 7, which would allow Holysaber to summon Level 3 to 6 monster. But that's not why he set Kastora as Pendulum Scale.

"I activate Polydefki's Pendulum Effect! Once per turn, I can lower the ATK of my opponent's monster equal to the ATK of a monster I control!" Holysaber declared, decreasing both of Playmaker's ace monsters' ATKs by Saint Kuriboh's ATK, which is 300.

Firewall Dragon ATK: 2500 = 2200

Decode Talker ATK: 2300 = 2000

"I activate Kastora's Pendulum Effect! Once per turn, I can add 1 Spell or Trap Card from my Deck to my hand. However, if I activate the card that I added to my hand through this effect, I can't activate other Spell or Trap until the end of this turn." Holysaber added a Spell Card from his Deck and then immediately revealed the card.

"I activate Magic Card: Link Pendulum! I can use Pendulum Monsters that I set as Pendulum Scales to perform Link Summon!" Holysaber activated the card he just added.

"What?!" Playmaker and Ai exclaimed together in disbelief.

"A Link Summon using Pendulum Scales?! That's possible?!" Soulburner is also shocked, having a hard time believing what he is seeing.

"Appear, the circuit that lights up the future!" Holysaber called forth the Link Circuit, setting Gondolieris, Polydefki, and Kastora to the Link Markers.

"Sacred sword that embodies hope. Descend from the heavenly sky and guide the tormented souls away from evil oppressors! Link Summon! Appear, Link 3, Olympios Stratos - Elpizo Harpe!" Holysaber summoned his ace monster for the second time.

"He brought back Elpizo Harpe!" Ryuki cheered at the comeback.

"I activate Elpizo Harpe's effect! When this card points to a monster, the ATK increases equal to the difference between that monster's ATK and my current LP!" Holysaber increased Elpizo Harpe's ATK by 150, following the differences between his LP and Saint Kuriboh's ATK.

Elpizo Harpe ATK: 2300 = 2450

"Battle! I attack Firewall Dragon with Elpizo Harpe! Khataros Slash!" Holysaber declared his Battle Phase.

Elpizo Harpe slashes his sword down at the dragon, who tries to block the sword with its hand. However, Elpizo Harpe is stronger, deflecting the dragon's hand before proceeding with his attack with an upward slash, destroying the dragon.

Playmaker LP: 625 = 375

"I activate Elpizo Harpe's effect! After this card battles, I can inflict damage equal to the ATK of the monster pointed by this card's Link Arrow! Katharsi Stream!" Holysaber continues.

Elpizo Harpe points its sword at Playmaker, shooting a stream of silver light energy that pushes him back.

Playmaker LP: 375 = 75

"The tide has turned to Holysaber's favor now." Flame commented with a tone of amazement at Holysaber.

"Playmaker has no card in his hand, and he only has Decode Talker whose ATK was decreased by Polydefki's effect in the previous turn. No matter how you look at it, he is in a huge pinch." Soulburner is both nervous and excited to see the outcome of this Duel.

Ai knows that they have nothing to lose in this Duel even if they lost. However, Ai refuses to just give up. His partner had already proven many times how he managed to go beyond expectations. Even when it seemed hopeless, Playmaker always found a way to open the path towards victory. This situation shouldn't be so different.

Holysaber has Elpizo Harpe and Saint Kuriboh on his field. If they could just attack Saint Kuriboh, they could've won with only Decode Talker. However, because of Polydefki's effect, Saint Kuriboh cannot be targeted for attack until the end of their turn. It also doesn't help that Decode Talker's ATK decreased. A monster strong enough to beat Elpizo Harpe even if the monster's effect is activated and can be summoned with their current situation is…

One certain monster comes into Ai's mind.

"That's right! Playmaker! Let's call that monster!" Ai suggested to his partner.

"That monster?" Playmaker looked at Ai confusedly.

"You know! The one we got from the labyrinth!" Ai reminded.

"!" Playmaker did include that monster into his deck this time because he thought it has something to do with Divine Ignis since

they found it in that labyrinth, and it might lead them to the said Ignis. Indeed, with that monster, they can win against him in an instant with their current situation. But for that to happen, they need at least one Effect Monster. If he fails to draw the monster…

"It's not over yet!" Ai yelled determinedly at his partner, startling him. It was like Ai just read his mind.

"You've done everything you can to battle him with your deck. You said before that your deck would respond, right?!" Ai reminded Playmaker's own words during his first Master Duel against Revolver.

Remembering that Duel, Playmaker was also in a similar situation like this moment. He bet everything on that one draw to win. Now, like that time, as if hearing his wish, the pulse of the Cyberse Monster intensified, asking to be called.

Playmaker looks at Holysaber. Despite his fear, the Olympios Stratos user still decided to continue the Duel. He tried his best to push away his fear, trying to continue to do his best to fight against him. Holysaber is giving his all in this Duel, responding to every of his moves with strong determination. It would be disrespectful if Playmaker just gave up without trying now. He wants to help Holysaber, and so he will fight to the end.

"You're right. I'm going to trust this one draw." Playmaker placed his fingers on the card at the top of his deck.

"My turn!" Playmaker did his Draw Phase.

Looking at the card he drew, Playmaker thanks his Cyberse Monster for answering his determination.

"When all monsters I control are Cyberse Monsters, I can Special Summon Cyberse Converter from my hand!" Playmaker Special Summoned Cyberse Converter in Attack Position to the Main Monster Zone next to Decode Talker.

Cyberse Converter (CYBERSE/EFFECT/LIGHT/ATK: 1000/DEF: 1000/LV: 2)

"Holysaber, I'm going to end this Duel with this monster! Appear! The circuit that leads to the future!" Playmaker pointed his arm up, summoning the Link Circuit.

"Arrowheards confirmed! The summoning conditions are at least two Effect Monsters! I set Link 3 Decode Talker and Cyberse Converter to the Link Markers! Circuits combined!" Playmaker set Link 3 Decode Talker to the Left, Top-Center, and Right Arrow of the Link Markers, and Cyberse Converter to the Bottom-Center Link Marker.

"Seize the wind that connects the unseen world! Link Summon! Appear, Link 4 Accesscode Talker!" Playmaker summoned a new Code Talker to the Extra Monster Zone.

Accesscode Talker (CYBERSE/LINK/DARK/ATK: 2300/LNK: 3/LM: Left, Top-Center, Right, Bottom-Center)

"Accesscode Talker?!" Holysaber stared wide-eyed at the Code Talker monster.

"That was the card I gave to Unnamed when we cleared the labyrinth! Why did Playmaker have it?!" Holysaber stared questioningly at the monster. However, this question was pushed aside as he immediately realized that he has more important situation to face.

"I activate Accesscode Talker's effect! When a Link Monster is used to summon it, it gains 1000 ATK for each of its Link Markers!" Playmaker used Decode Talker as material, and as Decode Talker has 3 Link Markers, Accesscode Talker's ATK is increased by 3000.

"ATK of 5300?!" Holysaber exclaimed in shock. He didn't expect Playmaker to still have more cards under his sleeve.

He only has Elpizo Harpe and Saint Kuriboh in his field. None of them can stand a chance against Accesscode Talker. He has no card in his hand and no card in his Graveyard that has the effect that can help him against Accesscode Talker. There really is nothing he can do to get out of this. This time, he is truly going to lose…

"I will end this, Holysaber. It's fine, right?" Playmaker asked.

Holysaber was surprised that Playmaker suddenly asked him now when victory is just within his rich. He thought that he already showed how he had steeled his resolve for this Duel. But that he hasn't done enough. Part of him was still unnerved by the thought of losing. Playmaker saw through this and that's why he asked. Playmaker was considerate of his feelings. He is truly a kind-hearted person. Holysaber appreciated that kindness. When Holysaber realized it, his chest didn't feel heavy anymore.

Holysaber smiled and nodded at Playmaker silently. Words were not necessary anymore.

"Battle! I attack Elpizo Harpe with AccescodeTalker!" Playmaker declared his Battle Phase.

Accesscode Talker moves its right arm to the back, eyes set on Elpizo Harpe who has readied his sword. Accesscode Talker then thrusts its lance forward at full speed and power. Elpizo Harpe raises his sword to block the lance, but alas, the lance breaks through the sword, piercing Elpizo Harpe right on his abdomen, destroying the Olympios Stratos Link Monster.

Elpizo Harpe explodes, sending Holysaber falling backwards from the backlash as his LP is depleted to nothing.

Holysaber LP: 450 = 0

"Holysaber!" Ryuki immediately goes to Holysaber's side once more, helping him sit up and check if he's hurt anywhere or having a sign

of breakdown. To her relief and bewilderment, Holysaber looks… pleased.

"Are you okay?" Playmaker asked concernedly.

"Yes. I feel better in fact." Holysaber assured. His chest feels lighter than ever. The fear and anxiety are still there, but for the first time, he feels they are slowly being lifted. He has finally succeeded in taking the first step. It's not impossible after all. He can do this. Little by little, until eventually he can completely let go of that burden.

"Say, do you have your answer yet? Will you join us?" Ai asked.

"Are you okay with me joining you? You don't think I'll be in the way?" Holysaber asked back. He wants to fight, but he's still worried that his condition would only hinder Playmaker and Soulburner.

"You're stronger than you believe you are, Holysaber. There are three things that proves you are a strong Duelist." Playmaker already expected that Holysaber might say that. Because of his condition, it's understandable that he has a confidence issue. Having Dueled him, Playmaker knows better that Holysaber has more strength and determination than the said person himself believed. He must let him know that he is strong and shouldn't think so little of himself.

"…?!" Holysaber paused, listening intently to Playmaker.

"First, it hasn't been that long since you received Olympios Stratos deck, but you're capable of using the deck so efficiently in such a short time. This proves that you're a fast learner." Based on Ai's story and his own observation after Dueling Holysaber, Playmaker is sure of Holysaber's capabilities. He is sharp, meticulous, able to quickly grasp the situation. The more he Duel, the quicker he'll grow.

"Second, throughout our Duel, you never let our guard down. You carefully assessed my cards and quickly formed a counter to my strategy, trying to speculate my next move even when it seemed I was at disadvantage." People with big ego usually underestimate

their opponents when they make a move that seems like a mistake, causing them to be filled with sense of victory and let their guard down. Holysaber is fortunately not one of those people. He didn't fail to analyze even the low-level monster he had. He came up with using Saint Kuriboh's effect to take advantage his Link Summoning, meaning that he had done some studying about his Dueling style.

"Third, despite being stricken by your trauma, you managed to stand up and continued the Duel until the end without breaking down. It might've been because you're not alone, but if you don't have indomitable will of your own, you couldn't have stood up even if we were there." Playmaker had learned that no matter how much someone tries, if they don't have the will to endure the hardship coming at them, then even if they have people willing to support him, it's meaningless and they'll getting nowhere. The fact that Holysaber still continued the Duel despite the odds proved that Holysaber has the will to see through his choice.

Holysaber blinks steadily as he carefully processes what Playmaker has told him.

"Three things… That speech pattern…" A certain memory comes to Holysaber as he recalls the familiar speech.

There was only one person that he knew saying things in the exact same speech pattern. He only heard it once, but it felt rather unique and that moment when he heard it was a positive one that it stuck in his mind. It also happened only recently. The person who spoke that way to him was…

"Fujiki-kun…?" Holysaber uttered the name without thinking while pointing at Playmaker. His mouth moved on its own before he even realized it.

The moment the name left his mouth, everybody is now staring wide-eyed at Holysaber. No one said anything from the shock of hearing that name until Ai broke the silence with his own way of being surprised.

"EH?! How did you find out?!" Ai yelled out in panic.

"Ai!" Playmaker chastised his AI partner.

"Wait, then, you really are, Fujiki-kun…?" Ryuki also couldn't help but ask. If this is true, then all this time, Playmaker has been going to the same school as her and Holysaber without them knowing.

"Ah! Errm, I mean, uh… !" Ai couldn't come up with a convincing denial now.

Flame sighed as he saw Ai just practically giving away his own partner's identity. Judging from Holysaber's tone, he himself wasn't sure of Playmaker's real identity. But thanks to Ai, there is no way out for them now. The cat is out of the bag.

"You know me in the real world? We've spoken directly?" Playmaker asked. There's no point in trying to deny it now. And he believes that Holysaber and Ryuki won't tell anyone about his real identity.

"Tomorrow." Holysaber replied, "Let's meet up tomorrow at Café Nagi. You work part-time there, right? I'll bring something that'll prove my identity."

Holysaber has made up his mind. He will trust Playmaker. That's why, now that he knows his identity, he will also reveal his. Holysaber is done running away. He'll fight and confront his past, together with Playmaker and Soulburner. He can't expect them to trust him if he doesn't put any effort into it first.

Playmaker was surprised when Holysaber offered to meet up in real life as themselves, without hiding behind their online alteregos. Holysaber didn't need to, but he willingly offers to reveal his own identity to them. That means…

" *He trusts me…"* Playmaker is pleasantly relieved. His sincerity has reached Holysaber.

"Okay. I'll be waiting there." Playmaker agreed.

Holysaber nodded in affirmation. He briefly looks at Ryuki, who understands his choice and accepts it. With everything settled, they have no reason to stay any longer. Just as the two of them are logging out, Holysaber turns to Playmaker one last time.

"See you tomorrow, Fujiki-kun."

Cafe Nagi - Central Plaza - Den City - Next Day

Yusaku is sitting on one of the empty tables in front of Cafe Nagi while Kusanagi is cooking some sausages as usual in preparation for customers coming to buy his hotdog. Following their appointment, Yusaku went straight to Cafe Nagi once the school hour ended. Takeru got held up by an extra class, so he'll come later once he finished.

Unlike some people who usually would get nervous and fidgeting while waiting to meet the person they've been longing to meet, Yusaku is completely calm like he usually does. Rather than him, it is Ai who is nervous and spent minutes staring at every person near Cafe Nagi, either people who just passed by or customers who bought hotdog from Kusanagi. Though Ai had made himself hidden and not be seen, people could feel his stare and it made them uncomfortable, something that Yusaku noticed.

"Ai, stop staring at people too much." Yusaku finally told his AI partner.

"Come on! I'm looking out for Holysaber! He said he'll meet up with us here today! When will he come?!" Ai looks at every direction where people are coming impatiently. He couldn't get a good night sleep (not that he needs sleep) because he was too busy wondering what kind of person Holysaber offline.

"He said he'll bring with him recognizable proof when we meet. Stay quiet and wait patiently." Yusaku replied calmly while sipping his coffee, not understanding why his partner is overreacting so much.

"Aren't you curious? You don't have any idea who he is?" Ai is honestly surprised that Yusaku could sit here waiting like nothing happened.

"By process of elimination, I concluded that he is a student from my school." Yusaku told him as he finished his coffee.

"Wait, what?! How did you narrow it down to that?!" Ai lost his footing upon hearing that, demanding an answer from Yusaku.

"First, he is a victim of the Lost Incident, meaning he is the same age as me and Takeru. He is undoubtedly a high-school student." While he doesn't know their exact age, Yusaku is positive from his information gathering that all the seven Lost Incident victims are around the same age. Even if there's an age difference, it would be only around one- or two-years difference between their age.

"Second, LINK VRAINS is only accessible in Den City. He must be living in Den City." You need to be in Den City or the locations within the city's parameters to log into LINK VRAINS.

"Third, Holysaber recognized me by my speech pattern. I don't talk much with anyone except for a few people. Except Kusanagi-san and a few times at school, I never have a conversation with people. For Holysaber to recognize me by my habit, he must be either one of the few students at school whom I had spoken to or overheard me talking that way." There are lots of schools other than Den Academy at Den City, but Yusaku never visited or even went near the other schools, so that only leaves Den Academy to be the only school where Holysaber could meet him.

"I see… that makes sense! Why I never thought about it?!" Ai fist-palmed after hearing the logic provided by Yusaku. Thinking more about what they knew about Holysaber, of course he must be a

student at Den Academy. Too bad he only knew that now. If he had known earlier, he would've accessed Den Academy's student's database and narrow down the students to find out who is Holysaber.

"Kuri!"

Yusaku and Ai looked down when they heard the familiar voice. For a second, they thought it was Linkuriboh, but the monster didn't come out from Yusaku's Duel Disk. Then, they saw a small, white-colored round-shaped robot jumping next to Yusaku's legs, trying to get their attention. Yusaku extends his hands, allowing the small robot to jump onto his palms.

"Kurikuri!"

"Saint Kuriboh!" Ai happily hugged the Duel Monster the second he recognized it. But he soon became bewildered by the form it is taking. "What's this?! You became a robot now?!"

"Saint Kuriboh."

A voice called out the Duel Monster that is occupying the small robot. Saint Kuriboh quickly jumps down from Yusaku's hands, going to the person who called it. Playmaker and Ai's gaze follows Saint Kuriboh until it lands on someone's palm the same way it rested on Yusaku's. Yusaku then looks up from Saint Kuriboh to the face of the person who is holding the Duel Monster. His eyes gradually widen as he recognizes the person standing in front of him.

Kento Hijiri.

The transfer student who came to his school just a few days ago.

It dawns on him then. Hijiri transferred to his school a day before Ai returned to his school. He also visited Cafe Nagi on that same day when he returned to LINK VRAINS. That was when he told Hijiri

about his three good points. He fits all the criteria. That explains everything.

Hijiri chuckled at his reaction before flashing a gentle smile.

"Hello, Playmaker."

SOL Technologies - Den City

SOL Technologies is in a tense state. After the appearance of the DIVINE Attribute cards possessed by the mysterious Duelist named Holysaber, phone calls and mails have been coming non-stop, and each of them is questioning if SOL Technologies has released DIVINE Attribute cards without the public knowing because one of the rumors that said that the founder of SOL Technologies was the only person to ever created DIVINE Attribute cards.

Among the busy staff, a young man is carefully assessing their situation. He is a fair skinned young man with blue and teal hair and pink eyes. He wears a suit which consists of a blue coat with a darker one underneath, a white shirt, and a black tie. He also wears blue sports trousers and black shoes.

His name is Akira Zaizen. The security chief of SOL Technologies.

Today is truly another hectic day, for three reasons. First, Playmaker and Dark Ignis returned to LINK VRAINS. Second, a Duelist using DIVINE Attribute Cyberse deck appeared. Third, another Duelist named Soulburner possessing the Fire Ignis appeared. The Cyberse World was destroyed, and now all these Duelists using Cyberse-Type and two of the six Ignis made an appearance at the exact same time. It couldn't be a coincidence. The fact that Holysaber and Soulburner helped Playmaker also meant the three of them are allies.

" *What's happening for them to appear now? Does it have something to do with the Duelist Playmaker was chasing after?"* Akira already

made an order to investigate the mysterious Duelist that Playmaker had dueled against.

" *Now that the Ignis have made their appearance, Queen will have us move faster to capture them. That DIVINE Attribute deck added another reason to move the bounty hunters."* Akira honestly doesn't like the situation he was put into. He owes Playmaker for saving him, his sister, and the whole network. He feels guilty to be in a position that demands him to give orders for his savior's capture. But quitting his job in the company is out of the question when he must make a living for himself and his sister.

If only there's something he can do for Playmaker without rising suspicion from SOL Technologies…

"You seem to be in a pensive mood, Zaizen."

Akira softly gasped when he heard the voice calling him from the door.

A man with icy blue eyes and short grey hair comes in. He carries himself with poise and a gracious countenance, showing his position of authority without needing to be spoken. He wears a suit which consists of a blue coat with a darker one underneath, a white shirt, and a black tie. He also wears blue sports trousers and black shoes.

Next to him is a young man with messy lime-green hair. He wears a long-sleeved white shirt with a black cord tie around his neck and a black waistcoat paired with black pants.

"Knight." Akira politely referred to the young man. Despite the man's young appearance, Knight is already 28 years old, two years older than him. It's unusual for Knight to come to the office in person. He wasn't even notified of the man's visit.

"Zaizen, I will personally join the bounty hunters in capturing the Ignis and Holysaber." Knight told the security chief with a gentlemanly smile.

"You?!" Akira exclaimed in shock before he coughed, excusing himself for raising his voice. "Pardon me for saying this, but sending you out seems too excessive."

"This is Queen's direct order. She wishes for the Ignis and DIVINE Attribute deck to be brought in as soon as possible." Knight dismissed Akira's concern.

"I already gave Queen my word and got her approval. Should we find Playmaker, Soulburner, and Holysaber again, I'll lead the bounty hunters to apprehend them. I expect you to give us your full support, Zaizen." Knight is no fool. He knew that the security chief holds Playmaker in high regard and is reluctant to capture the person whom he owed his life to. While he understands the dilemma Akira is having, that is of no importance compared to the goal that must be achieved.

Knight narrows his eyes at the security chief. Being a sharp man he is, Akira sees through the underlying threat should he goes against his order. Knight smiles in satisfaction when Akira bowed as his sign of obedience. He turns to the huge digital screen showing Playmaker, Soulburner, and Holysaber.

His gaze locks on Holysaber, the Duelist who uses the never-before-seen DIVINE Attribute deck.

"And I must say, I am curious to test out Holysaber's skill."

NEXT CHAPTER:

Chapter 5 - A Fragment of Memory: Yusaku starts to remember things about his past that he had forgotten. Meanwhile, Kento experienced more dreams about Divine Ignis and consult with with Ai and Flame about the meaning behind his dreams.

ORIGINAL CARDS

Holysaber

Olympios Stratos - Anthopolis (CYBERSE/DIVINE/ATK: 500/LNK: 1/LM: Bottom-Center) - When this card points to a monster, your opponent can only target that monster for an attack.

Olympios Stratos - Gondolieris (CYBERSE/DIVINE/LINK/ATK: 600/LM: Bottom-Right/LNK: 1) - This card can only attack monsters with the highest ATK on the field. When this card is Link Summoned using a Link Monster as its material, once per turn, it cannot be destroyed by Battle and any damage is inflicted to your opponent instead.

Olympios Stratos - Polydefki (CYBERSE/DIVINE/PENDULUM/EFFECT/ATK: 1500/DEF: 2000/ LV: 5/PS: 7) - Monster Effect: When this card is Link Summoned using a Link Monster as its material, once per turn, it cannot be destroyed by Battle and any damage is inflicted to my opponent instead. After Polydefki's activates this effect, it's placed in my Spell & Trap Zone as Pendulum Scale and monster who was originally targeted for the attack cannot be targeted until my opponent's next End Phase. Pendulum Effect: Once per turn, you can lower the ATK of your opponent's monster equal to the ATK of a monster I control.

Olympios Stratos - Kastora (CYBERSE/DIVINE/PENDULUM/EFFECT/ATK: 1500/DEF: 2000/LV: 5/PS: 2) - Monster Effect: Once per turn, you can add 1 Spell or Trap Card from your Deck to your hand. However, if you activate the card that you added to your hand through this effect, you can't activate other Spell or Trap until the end of this turn. More effect to be added later.

Reflect Destruction (Trap) - When your monster couldn't destroy my opponent's monster by Battle, you can destroy another monster your opponent controls and decrease the ATK of the monster that wasn't destroyed equal to the ATK of the destroyed monster. At the end of the Battle Phase, by banishing this card from your Graveyard, you can Special Summon a Level 5 or lower monster from your

Deck, but that monster will be destroyed at the end of your next End Phase.

Link Pendulum (Magic) - You can use Pendulum Monsters that I set as Pendulum Scales to perform Link Summon

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

Again, I hope I did well in writing this chapter, especially the Duel. There's the OCG/TCG monster's effect that I changed for convenience. Maybe you won't agree with the changes I made for the OCG/TCG effects, but I assure you that this won't be a frequent occurrence. I already said this in the oneshot prologue, but I'll say it again, I decided to include Accesscode Talker because I think it was a waste that Accesscode Talker was only used in the last episode of the anime and as far as I remembered, there was no explanation how and when they gained Accesscode Talker, so I decided to make it has some sort of connection with Divine Ignis. Again, in case you haven't, read the prologue chapter about the labyrinth that Ai mentioned.

This chapter also introduced one of SOL Technologies' upper ranks, Knight, that in the anime only appeared during early episodes of Season 1 and never appeared again since then. SOL Technologies won't be neglected and will play more roles in this story. Although, it'll take a long time because Season 2 will focus more on the Ignis.

TRIVIA

-Translation of the Olympios Stratos monsters' names:

1. Anthopolis: Florist

2. Gondolieris: Gondolier (I'm sure it's obvious for everyone lol)

Fragments of Memory

AUTHOR'S ANNOUNCEMENT:

Big thanks to ***tsukikami02, Hell Kaiser Younes, Ulrich362, darktheking73, T.V. 2000*** for reviewing the previous chapter!

Ulrich362: Thank you for pointing out the error. I fixed it once you told me. I'll try to be more thorough when writing the next Duel. (^_^)

darktheking73: This is the first I heard about that theory about Jin and Haru. Too bad, that won't be happening in this fic though. I have other plans.

Before going to the chapter, I want to inform you that the next update would take a while because I injured my hand, so I can't type as fast as usual with just one hand. And even though so far I managed to keep my update schedule every seven days, I'm not sure I can keep it up with my current workload. I'm sorry that you'll have to wait longer for my next update, I hope for your understanding.

In the meantime, I hope you'll enjoy reading this chapter!

A boy wearing a brown jacket with a green shirt, blue pants, and a pair of brown boots was running in a hurry. His light blue bangs moved up and down from all the running. Today, he bought new cards with his friends at a nearby store once school ended. He couldn't wait to show his mother and discuss how to use these cards for his Deck. He was positive that these cards were good for new additions. Last time, his mother praised him for coming up with a good move. With these new cards, he'll come up with an even better move.

Yusaku Fujiki could still remember the first time he started to show interest in Duel Monsters card game.

It happened last year, when his mother took him to her school reunion. She and some of her old friends were holding a small Duel Monsters tournament. He watched his mother defeating her opponents with her skillful Dueling. Watching the Duels, Yusaku and the other children couldn't help but became interested. Immediately after the tournament ended, Yusaku and the other children asked their respective parents to tell them more about Duel Monsters. Being a kind-hearted mother she was, Yusaku's mother started teaching him Duel Monsters.

At first, he borrowed his mother's cards to play with his friends. As he fully understood the general rules, his mother then bought him cards of his own for him to form his own Deck. He'd Dueled against his friends at school and then discussed the Duel with his mother afterwards, who'd gave him advice and clues on what to improve. One was one of such times. He looked forward to talking with his mother about his new cards and the Duel he had at school today.

His excitement to arrive home quickly to meet his mother made him fail to notice there was someone else running from the other corner.

As a result, Yusaku inadvertently bumped into him.

"Ouch…" Yusaku winced as he fell on his butt.

Looking at the person whom he bumped into, he was a fair-skinned boy with blue eyes and white hair that spiked backwards at the sides, with purple highlights. He was wearing a gray hoodie, pink shirt underneath, blue jeans and blue shoes. He was taller and seemed to be older than Yusaku.

Duel Monsters cards were scattered on the ground from the bump.

"Sorry." Yusaku apologized while helping the boy pick up the fallen cards. Seeing the cards were Duel Monsters cards, Yusaku couldn't help himself to ask, "Do you play Duel Monsters too?"

"Yeah. You too?" The other boy asked back.

"Yeah. I love it too!" Yusaku answered with evident excitement in his tone.

"Then, want to come to my house and look at my Deck?" The other boy suggested.

Yusaku wanted to go back home and showed his cards to his mother soon. But it wouldn't hurt to stop by to play for a bit and go home later, right? He could borrow a phone to call his mother at home to not make her worry for him. Besides, it would be fun to make a new friend whom he can play Duel Monsters with.

"Sure!" Yusaku accepted the boy's invitation.

Yusaku's Room - Apartment - Den City

Yusaku opens his eyes. They take in every ray of light from the window. Judging from the chirping of birds and lack of sounds of people and transportations from outside, it's still early in the morning. Looking at the clock on his table, it's still 06.00 AM. Ai is also still staying quiet in his Duel Disk. Usually, when it's the time for him to go to school, Ai would wake him up, taking up the role of his alarm clock. Today, he woke up earlier than usual. Upon waking up his brain replayed the last few scenes of his dream.

No. Rather than a dream, it was an old memory.

A long-forgotten memory that has resurfaced in the form of a dream.

"Lately, I'm remembering things that I couldn't remember before…" Yusaku murmured while staring tiredly at the ceiling.

Recently, he starts to remember things that he had forgotten because of the Lost Incident. He was so traumatized that he forgot certain things that happened around that time. His therapist once said that it was a dissociative amnesia, a disorder characterized by retrospectively reported memory gaps. These gaps involve an

inability to recall personal information, usually of a traumatic or stressful nature. The trauma he developed as the result of the Lost Incident caused him to suffer memory loss. To be precise, he locked up those memories.

After he defeated Knights of Hanoi, coming to terms with his past, bit by bit, those memories he had locked up naturally came out again. It happened when he saw or heard something that triggered those memories, or through dreams like he just had.

He remember it clearly now. The face of the boy whom he bumped into. The boy who became his beacon of hope, encouraging during his sufferings, giving him a reason to never give up until the day he could go back home.

"That was you… Revolver…"

That's why Revolver couldn't stand his wrongdoings and he became his voice of hope. Before he recovered his memories, Yusaku could only remember his voice, not his face. Meeting the owner of the voice who gave him hope was partly the reason why he fought against Knights of Hanoi. Of course, it was a shock to learn that the person who became his voice of hope, whom he considered as a friend, was none other than the leader of the Knights of Hanoi.

Even so, he realized then, that Revolver, that Ryoken, had always been filled with guilt for what his father had done. Just as Yusaku had let go of his past, he wanted Ryoken to do the same, no longer being bound by his father.

However, Ryoken not only rejected his plea to become friends, but also made the conscious decision to continue the mission of eliminating the Ignis species. It's not that Yusaku couldn't understand why. For years he had been following his father's mission to eliminate the Ignis, and then during the battle at Tower of Hanoi, he lost him. On top of grieving for his father, Ryoken was entrusted with his father's dying wish to bring about peace for humanity by eliminating the Ignis whom he believed would bring an end to

humanity. He was driven by the sense of responsibility to continue what his father worked so hard to do.

"Do we have no other choice but to fight when we meet again?" Yusaku wondered.

Yusaku is fully aware that this is a naive wish, but he hopes that they wouldn't need to fight again.

Cafe Nagi - Stardust Road - Den City

Perhaps because of the dream he had, Yusaku fell asleep again and had a hard time waking up even when Ai pestered him. It took a while until he finally opened his eyes and realized that he was late for school. Not only was he late, but he also dozed off in the middle of the class, earning him a scolding from his teacher and must stayed for extra class as a punishment. Because of that, he is now late with his usual routine to visit Cafe Nagi after school.

"What's wrong with you today?" Ai asked. It was unusual for Yusaku to oversleep. He dozed off during classes occasionally, but he was usually careful enough to pick up the time not to make the teachers notice like today.

"Just a bit tired." Yusaku answered with a quiet yawn. The dream affected him more than he thought. Getting a punishment was not really a problem for him. As long as he keeps up with his good grades, he won't get into much trouble with the teachers. He won't call himself a straight-A student, but he's confident enough in his study to get good grades to graduate.

"Sleeping too much and you'll become a sloth in no time!" Ai joked while making his sloth impersonation.

"Shut up." And as usual, Yusaku shot him down with his usual command.

By the time they arrived at Cafe Nagi, everyone is already there, sitting at their table and conversing. Ever since Kento revealed himself to be Holysaber, Kento regularly visits Cafe Nagi, together with Kazue who also revealed herself to be Ryuki, and Saint Kuriboh who occupied a small robot. Cafe Nagi became livelier even when there were no customers. Since it would be too crowded to have a discussion inside the truck, Kusanagi set up additional tables and chairs specifically for them, apart from the ones set up for customers.

"What?! You're supposed to be a second year but got held back due to sickness?!" Takeru looked surprised at Kento after the latter told him his age and explained why he was still in the first year. "S-sorry, I don't know you're older than me, Hijiri-san."

"You don't need to be formal with me now, Homura-kun. I'm only a year older, and we're in the same grade, so just treat me the same as the other students." Kento told Takeru who seemed ready to speak more politely to him.

As it turned out, Takeru was already acquainted with Kento and Kazue. They happened to meet on Takeru's first day at school. Takeru was equally shocked when he found out that Kento and Kazue were Holysaber and Ryuki, respectively. But it didn't take long for them to get along. Kento was quiet and didn't talk much when Yusaku first saw him, but Kento was actually more sociable than him. Once you get to know him, it's easy to talk with him.

"You heard him, Takeru. Just call him Kento." Flame didn't need a second thought to address Kento by his first name. If the guy himself approved, he saw no reason to decline. On the bright side, it would get them closer as friends.

"Flame, don't just decide on your own." Takeru told his A.I. partner with a scolding tone. However, Kento then nodded along with the Fire Ignis.

"As he said, I don't mind at all. In return, I'll call you by your first name too. It's fair, right? Okay, Takeru-kun?" Kento suggested as he called him by his first name. He must take the initiative to make Takeru more comfortable with him.

"Okay. I understand, Kento." Takeru couldn't decline if Kento said it like that. And thinking more about it, talking politely to Kento would make the latter feel uncomfortable instead.

"Then, you can call me by my first name too, Homura-kun." Kazue chimed in between them, smiling at Takeru with anticipation.

"Err… to call Senpai by her first name is a bit…" Takeru hesitated. Kento is in the same grade and class as him, but it's a different case altogether if it's Kazue who is obviously a senior. And he doesn't want to imagine what the other students would do if words got out that he calls the popular senior by her first name. Attending Den Academy for a few days was enough to make Takeru understand that Kazue has a lot of admirers.

"My, you'd call Kento by his name but not me? Discrimination against girl here?" Kazue looked downcast while placing a hand on the right side of her face, gesturing disappointment.

"W-what?! N-no! Not at all!" Takeru flails his hands unsurely to not offend his senior.

Kento and Flame are watching in amusement as Takeru helplessly trying to cheer up what seems to be a saddened Kazue. It's quite entertaining to see Takeru trying his best to make a compromise when it's obvious to them that Kazue is only playing with him. Kento starts to feel bad when Takeru look like he is pleading for help. Time for him to step in.

"Takeru-kun, don't take what she said seriously. Kazue, don't tease him like that." Kento interfered before Kazue could make the bespectacled boy a panic mess. Kazue playfully sticks her tongue out before retreating to her seat while giggling at Takeru's reaction.

"You still have a lot to learn, Takeru." Flame said with a sigh.

"As my partner, shouldn't you back me up?" Takeru complained. He paused when he saw Yusaku and Ai approaching them.

"What's this? What's this? Did you guys have fun while we were not here?" Ai asked.

"Nothing. Takeru-kun and I just decided to be on first name basis." Kento answered.

"Then, you should also call Yusaku by his first name! You're okay with that right, Yusaku?" Ai suggested to his partner.

"Sure, I don't mind." Yusaku nodded. Whether being called by his first or last name isn't a big deal to him. Yusaku takes a seat across Takeru just as Kusanagi arrives with a tray of coffee in his hand.

"It seems my new regulars are having fun together." Kusanagi commented while placing each cup for the four students seated.

The owner of the cafe is watching the scene before him. Yusaku is sitting with his friends from school, eating and talking together, like a normal high-school student. Kusanagi was surprised when Yusaku first brought Takeru and Flame. Now, he is even more surprised by the addition of two more friends. Before, it was just him and Yusaku. He was okay with Yusaku's sole company. However, having more people like this made him happier. Because this shows progress in Yusaku becoming more socialized with others, something he couldn't do before.

If Jin had recovered, no longer haunted by the incident, he would've been here with them, becoming friends with Yusaku and the others, having fun together like the boy his age should have. Alas, just as Jin was making progress in his recovery, he became a victim yet again.

" *As we let time pass by, what's happening to Jin…"* Kusanagi is afraid to imagine what's happening to his brother right now. For what

reason anybody would abduct his younger brother?

From the corner of his eyes, Kento sense the sadness in Kusanagi's eyes while watching them. Though he can't fully discern what exactly Kusanagi is thinking, Kento had an idea what was running through his mind from the way he was looking at them. If his guess is right, Kento can understand why. Kento already heard what happened to Jin. Kusanagi was just beginning to hope, only for his brother to be taken away right in front of his eyes must've been beyond painful.

"By the way, I've been meaning to ask you, how did you get Accesscode Talker?" Kento asked, hoping to stir Kusanagi away from his sad thoughts. He also want to get some answer about the card in Yusaku's possession.

"That card was a card that I got from clearing a labyrinth three months ago. I gave it to a guy that I hired to be my escort." Kento explained. He didn't get to ask before because he was preoccupied with other things, and this was the chance for him.

Kusanagi, Yusaku, and Ai stop at whatever they are doing as they are staring at him wide-eyed. They are staring at him like he just said something that was out of the world. Thinking about it, he hadn't told them about him having another online identity aside from Holysaber. Maybe he should've started with explaining that first?

"Hold on a sec, are you telling me that… you're… you are Tsurugi?!" Kusanagi slammed his hands on the table as he got closer to Kento, surprising the said person.

"Huh?! How do you-" Before Kento could ask, Kusanagi interrupted him, pointing a finger at himself.

"I'm Unnamed!" Kusanagi revealed.

Now, it's Kento and Kazue's turn to be surprised, while Takeru and Flame looked at them back and forth with bewilderment.

"Unnamed?! That Unnamed?!" Kento pointed at Kusanagi in shock, which Kusanagi and Yusaku answered with a nod.

That would explain why Yusaku has Accesscode Talker and why Unnamed suddenly contacted him after a long time. Unnamed made that request on Ai and Yusaku's behalf to get information about either Knights of Hanoi or DIVINE-Attribute cards. Even before then, Unnamed also investigated rumors about Cyberse.

"Talk about one heck of a coincidence." Ai commented with astonishment.

"It's too much to call it a coincidence. I believe it was fate that has brought us here." Kazue retorted. People connected to the Lost Incident met and gathered, and now learned that even before this, they had met before, she refused to believe this was something that happened due to coincidence. There must be a meaning for them to be here together.

"What a shock. I didn't expect to meet you again like this, Unnamed." Albeit Kento is surprised, he isn't displeased. On the contrary, he is glad to know that Kusanagi is Unnamed. He has been wondering how Unnamed was doing, so knowing Kusanagi is Unnamed put his heart at ease.

"Sorry, but we're at a loss here, mind explaining to us what this is about?" Takeru raises his hand in question.

"Don't leave us out." Flame also demands an explanation.

Kento takes the first turn to tell his side of the story, how he has another avatar named Tsurugi and used it to work as a cyber investigator since he was 15 years old. He created a chatroom specifically for clients who wished to make requests for his service, which was where he met Kusanagi who used the pseudonym Unnamed.

Kusanagi then take turns explaining his side of the story, starting from how he learned about the rumor of DIVINE-Attribute cards from Ai and asked Kento, using his Tsurugi avatar, to investigate the rumor, which led them and Ghost Girl to go to the rumored labyrinth and cleared it together, receiving Accesscode Talker as a reward. By all rights, Kento should've been the one who keep it because it was only thanks to him, they managed to solve the Duel Puzzle, but Kento refused and insisted for Kusanagi to take it, which Kusanagi then gave to Yusaku.

"So that happened. You must have had it rough." Takeru commented. Listening to Kento and Kusanagi's story, it was like listening to one of those adventure movies.

"That's right! Since we were talking about the labyrinth and Accesscode Talker, I remembered! When unlocking the protection program placed on the card, I found a shred of Divine Ignis' program." Ai spoke up. He had completely forgotten about it after what happened recently. Now was the right time to bring it up while he remembered.

"Divine Ignis'?!" Flame perked up at the mention of the missing Ignis.

"The lock program was complicated as always, only when I met Yusaku again I managed to unlock it." When they first got Accesscode Talker, they tried their best to solve the lock program protecting Accesscode Talker, but in the end, they couldn't use the card during the battle at Tower of Hanoi. Since then, Yusaku and Kusanagi didn't make any attempt to unlock it again, only after Ai returned, they gave it a second try and this time successfully unlocked the card, allowing them to use it against Holysaber.

"This card was granted to you as a prize for completing the labyrinth, that means Divine Ignis no doubt was the one who made the labyrinth." Ai said with certainty. No one could create a high-level program except Divine Ignis.

"But why bother creating a labyrinth? Why didn't he just approach you?" Kento wondered. It was strange that Divine Ignis decided to keep hiding instead of going to Ai. Was there something that kept him from going to Ai?

"That's what I wanna know. Other than this card, I couldn't find a single bit clue about him." Ai kept wondering the same question but couldn't come up with an answer. Wherever his best friend is right now, he hopes that he is safe, especially with unknown enemies targeting them.

"Hey, can you tell me more about him? Divine Ignis, I mean." Kento asked Ai and Flame. Seeing Ai and Flame interacting with their respective partners, he couldn't help but become interested in knowing about Divine Ignis, "He is the Ignis based on me, right? It makes me curious."

Ai and Flame are stares at Kento, they are staring for several seconds like they are in deep thought before they finally speak,

"Divine Ignis is honest, humble, solemn, responsible, and mature. I'd say he'd make a fine leader, only third after Light Ignis and Water Ignis." Flame is the one to start describing the Divine Ignis. In his memory, Divine Ignis usually became the peacemaker. If there were Ignis who got into a fight or argument, Divine Ignis would try to get both sides to calm down and talk things through peacefully, making them to reach a compromise and even help finding solution together. Flame always found his company enjoyable and he's easy to talk to.

"But he also has his playful side. He liked to play with me and the other monsters back at the Cyberse World. Playing with him was never boring." Ai recalled those happy times when he played with Divine Ignis. Though he had the quality of a leader like Light Ignis and Water Ignis, unlike Light Ignis who was more reserved and Water Ignis who can be too nagging, Divine Ignis was opened-minded and didn't hesitate to approach the other Ignis and make a small talk. Divine Ignis was the only one willing to try understanding

his way of having fun. Ai never felt bored with Divien Ignis' company, and that's why it didn't take long for them to become best friends.

"His lenience and patience were admirable, since he managed to put up with Ai's antics and still believed that Ai could do his work. It's beyond my comprehension that he enjoyed hanging out with you despite all the troubles you had given him." Flame sighed. In every Ignis meeting, Divine Ignis never once stopped trying to convince Ai to join their discussion no matter how many times he failed. He didn't listen to the other Ignis when they told him to just leave Ai be and not to bother with making him do his work. Divine Ignis never gave up on that. It was even more surprising when Divine Ignis started to make some time to actually hang out with Ai.

"What's wrong with having fun once in a while?! Aren't you tired doing nothing but work?" Ai pouted as he argued.

"Except that you never worked, you always played. That wasn't 'once in a while.'" Flame pointed out the fact in response.

"B-both you get along well with the Divine Ignis?" Kento intruded before the two Ignis could start another round.

"He is someone I'd consider well-liked among the Ignis. He is a friend that I trust. But I'll say Ai is the closest with Divine Ignis among all of us, a surprising fact to this day." Flame said rather reluctantly, turning to the said Dark Ignis.

"We are best buds!" Ai declared proudly with somewhat smugness from the way he placed his hands on his waist and puffing up his chest.

"It is truly a wonder how that was possible…" Flame shakes his head, unsure whether he wants to know or not with what happened between Ai and Divine Ignis that made them so close. But seeing no merit in finding out about it now, Flame decided to shift the topic slightly, "You remind us quite a lot of the Divine Ignis, Kento"

"Me?"

"I think your kindness and the way you treat Saint Kuriboh are what reminds us of Divine Ignis." Flame has observed since their first met until now, the way Kento speaks and his interaction with Saint Kuriboh, he almost feels like he is watching Divine Ignis himself. But of course, Kento lacks the maturity and dignity that Divine Ignis possessed. For once, Ai nods in agreement.

"I-is that so…" Kento didn't know why, but he felt embarrassed.

"Oh, and he was also a curious guy. He regularly went out to observe humans." Ai adds as he remember those times when Divine Ignis would temporarily left Cyberse World to watch how humans were living their lives.

"Observed humans? What for?"

"Us, Ignis, were created to become the guide of humanity. Divine Ignis said that to fulfil our purpose, it's necessary to learn more about humans. I'll say that after observing humans for so long, he came to love humans." Ai couldn't forget the obvious fondness shown on Divine Ignis' face when he asked him the question.

"Out of seven of us, Divine Ignis was always the most curious about humans." Flame himself did have a curiosity for humans when they were still living in the Cyberse World, but never to the same extent as Divine Ignis. There was one time when Divine Ignis invited him to come along, but he refused because he prioritized his duty. In return, Divine Ignis sometimes asked Flame to do his work in his place until he returned. Flame never refused that request since Divine Ignis had always been diligent, so him, going out doing his own thing for once in a while was not a problem.

Kento's curiosity grows after listening to Ai and Flame. Knowing a little about what kind of A.I. Divine Ignis was, Kento now is hoping to meet the Ignis based on him, especially when seeing how Ai and Flame are with their respective partners. Yusaku and Ai often banter

due to their opposing personalities. Ai's penchant to get Yusaku's attention by making childish remarks is met with seeming annoyance from Yusaku, but there is an underlying attachment and trust that proves that despite his outward coldness, Yusaku doesn't actually hate their little banter. Flame also likes to diss and roast Takeru due to the latter's clumsiness and lack of tech knowledge, but when the time comes, he'd always be there for his Origin as his guardian or the sort, and Takeru takes the advice and wisdom from his Ignis partner to the heart.

" *I wonder… if I can become partners with Divine Ignis like Yusaku-kun and Takeru-kun…"*

Kento is out of his reverie when Yusaku patted him by his shoulder, almost surprising him.

"Kento, you did say that you're okay with it, but I'll ask you again, are you sure you're okay giving this card to me?" Yusaku asks as he holds out Accesscode Talker in his hand.

"Yes. I don't mind. I think you have more affinity with that card." Accesscode Talker is a powerful monster to have in one's arsenal, but Kento just started getting used to his Olympios Stratos Deck and unsure if adding Accesscode Talker is right. Plus, when it comes to Code Talker monsters, then Yusaku has more experience and based on the composition of his Deck, Accesscode Talker suits Yusaku more than him.

"And Ai seems to feel very attached with that card, so it's best for you to keep it." Kento smiles to assure Ai. Just from a brief glance, he could see Ai was nervous that Yusaku might give the card to him. That card is connected to his best friend, it's not surprising that Ai became attached to the card. Seeing Ai like that, Kento is convinced that it'd be best for Yusaku to keep it.

Kento believes he made the right decision when Ai is jumping happily while thanking him for allowing them to keep the card.

Kento's Room - Hijiri Residence - Den City

Kento slumps on his back on his bed, letting out a huff as he just finished taking a bath and changed to his pajamas. Today was unexpectedly fun. He felt quite bad for Kusanagi who was worried for his brother, but he was pretty happy to get acquainted with his new friends. He had some friends from his previous school, but none of them shared the same connection as he does with Yusaku and the others. He never thought he'd gain new friends this way.

He turns to the photograph on his desk, showing him with Kazue and his late best friends. If his best friend is still here with him, he'd be happy for him, and Kento knows for sure that his best friend would get along well with Yusaku and the others. Kazue would agree with him too.

He knows there's no point in thinking "what-ifs" now. Even so he can't help it. It's only two months ago that his best friend died. Kazue still hasn't gotten over him either. She still needs times to let accept her beloved boyfriend's death.

"Oh boy, I'm having these thoughts again…" Kento shakes his head. The Lost Incident and then his best friend's death on top of it. He must work harder not to let his mind stray him back to his grief. His parents' death, his best friend's death, he must accept it no matter how hard it is. Death is inevitable thing, inseparable from all living beings.

Kento covers himself in his blanket, hoping that an early sleep would stop him from entering another state of grief.

When Kento opened his eyes, he is surprised to see an unfamiliar place. He can't move any part of his body. When he tried to speak, no voice came out of his mouth. His eyes then moves down, looking at what is below. He is in a big wide room with nothing saves for a few boxes against the walls. Aside from the boxes, there is also someone lying on a bed that is connected to a machine.

"My father didn't create the Ignis to cause chaos in the world. To oppose the danger facing humanity, my father's goal was to create humanity's successor."

Not far from the man lying on the bed, stands three men. Two are Yusaku and Kusanagi, with Ai in Yusaku's Duel Disk as usual. Standing across them is a young man with a tall young, fair skin man with blue eyes and has white hair that spikes backwards at the sides, with purple highlights. On his right hand, he has a tattoo of a red triangle. He is wearing a pink v-neck shirt underneath a light gray suit jacket, with black trousers that ends above his ankles.

The one who spoke up just now, is the white-haired young man, who seems to be only a few years older than Kento himself and Yusaku. At least one or two years older.

"Humanity's successor?" Ai repeated.

"No matter how much we evolve, unexpected phenomena always threaten us with extinction. And even if they don't occur, a human's life always ends in death. My father often talked about that. But as long as human minds are trapped in flash suited for Earth's environment, that danger cannot be avoided." The man begins to explain.

"So, my father entrusted his dreams to A.I. because they're not trapped in flesh. A.I. with free will. He believed they were the legitimate successor to humans. My father was obsessed with this idea. To gather data for the basis of his idea, he and his six assistants caused the Lost Incident. My father kidnapped seven children and forced them to Duel. He believed duels were the best way for A.I. to understand humans." When the man said so, his narrowed gaze turns introspective for a moment.

Kento, hearing the man's explanation, gaped. That man said his father caused the Lost Incident. Then, the man who is lying on the bed, is Dr. Kogami, the very man responsible for ruining his life?! Neither Yusaku nor Kusanagi ever said anything about this.

"I was young then. And I watched you. But I was eight years old. I couldn't fully comprehend what was happening. I thought something scary might be going on. But I couldn't ask my father. Or any of his assistants. I wanted to believe that they were doing valuable research. But the children's screams tore at my chest. Crushed by feelings of guilt, I reported the incident." The man admitted, earning him surprise from the other occupants of the room, including Kento.

"An anonymous report uncovered the Lost Incident," Yusaku remembered. "That was you, Revolver?"

Kento had no control of his body, but he is positive that had he did, he'd gone stiff at that moment when Yusaku uttered the name.

Revolver.

The man who is speaking with Yusaku, Kusanagi, and Ai right now is none other than the leader of Knights of Hanoi.

And Revolver is the son of Dr. Kogami, the ringleader of the Lost Incident.

Right now, he is seeing Revolver's real-life identity.

" *No, putting that aside, did I just hear it right? Revolver was the one who saved us?"* Kento didn't get it. Yes, Revolver did mention he was only eight years old when the incident happened, so it wasn't strange for a child to report when something bad happened. But then, if he did, why did he continue to follow his father's will as the leader of the Knights of Hanoi?

"So he saved the two of you?" Ai asked.

"I quickly regretted saving you," Revolver said quickly, as if trying to dismiss something.

Kento's chest hurts when he heard that. It isn't like this is the first time someone's words hurt his heart. But now, he feels that he truly

understand for the first time that words could hurt far more than hard stones or even the sharpest knife. Words are not just words. They have a great and terrible power that impacts one's heart. And this one? It hurts. A lot.

"You were saved, but… When SOL Technologies covered up the incident, my father was imprisoned. I was alone all that time, waiting for my father to come home." Revolver said with a scowl on his face.

Kento doesn't know what to think. Even though he can understand how hard it was for Revolver back then, he also feels bitter that Revolver would regret his decision to save them.

"And then he came home. Fearing the incident would come to light, SOL Technologies infected him with a virus and put him in a coma. But with the help of the four Knights, I was able to resurrect my father in the network. And then I asked him what happened." Though he spoke and gestured calmly, there is rage hiding behind both the gaze of his eyes and the tone of his voice.

"While my father was imprisoned, he completed a great experiment. Using samples from the seven children, he created the Ignis - seven A.I.s with free will, each represents the seven attributes."

At the mention of attributes, Yusaku blinks.

"Seven attributes? What do you mean? There are only six attributes in Duel Monsters." Yusaku inquired. Duel Monsters consisted of six attributes: Darkness, Light, Water, Fire, Wind, and Earth. That's what known by everyone to this day. But Revolver mentioned the Ignis represented seven attributes.

"Do you mean…" Yusaku then remembered the rumor about Divine-Attribute cards. As if reading Yusaku's mind, Revolver nods.

"Yes. DIVINE-Attribute is not just a rumor, it's real. It does exist." Revolver confirmed. However, rather than indulging with the detail about the seventh Attribute, he continued his story, "The Ignis then

created the Cyberse World, their own space inside the network where no humans could reach. That's where they created the Cyberse cards. And in Cyberse World, they created network super matter called Data Material. Humans couldn't comprehend its makeup. Data processing became thousands of times faster."

Kento remember this part. Yusaku didn't explain it as detailed as Revolver, but he can follow the explanation.

"When the streams converge, it forms the Data Storm. SOL Technologies monopolized Data Material. By including it in their network system, they made huge profits. But my father began to feel anxious about our research. Using the Ignis's Data Material, my father created a supercomputer. To analyze and predict the Ignis's growth."

"So the Ignis's growth had the possibility to surpass the professor's expectations." Yusaku realized.

"Exactly. And the result was surprising," Revolver said.

"What was it?" Ai asked.

"The end of humanity. He believed that the Ignis would develop at a rapid pace and erase humanity in the process." Revolver revealed.

Kento has a hard time believing that part. Ai and Flame don't look harmful in the slightest. He doesn't sense any ill will from them, let alone putting an end to humanity.

"What? How could he reach a conclusion like that?" Yusaku questioned.

"He didn't believe it, either. We all believed that the Ignis would grow by helping people and allowing them to live longer. But after he ran several billion simulations, the end result was the same: AI would attempt to supervise humans, which will lead people to view A.I. as an enemy. As my father put it, humans have dominated all other

lifeforms on this planet for centuries; why would we allow ourselves to be dominated in turn by A.I.? And just like how humans would view A.I. as the enemy, A.I.s would view humans as the enemy." Revolver revealed more.

"Was SOL Technologies aware of this?" Yusaku asked again.

"Of course they were. But these were the same people who infected my father with a computer virus. At that moment, my father decided on his mission: To do whatever it took to kill the Ignis. And I and his assistants followed him. My father formed the Knights of Hanoi and raided the Cyberse World. But… That Ignis hid the Cyberse World and escaped." Revolver glared at the Dark Ignis in Yusaku's Duel Disk.

Yusaku's eyes widens slightly as another realization hit him.

"Those were Ai's memories that Kusanagi and I saw. You, invading the Cyberse World." Yusaku recalled.

"We kept searching for that Ignis. To find the Cyberse World. But when you appeared, Playmaker, our plan ended in failure. The rest you know. To accomplish our goal, we carried out our final plan - the Tower of Hanoi." Revolver revealed.

"Unbelievable…" Kusanagi muttered, his fists clenched at his sides. "This all started because of Dr. Kogami's crazy plan ten years ago!"

"!"

Kento abruptly wakes up with a loud gasp. He sit up as he breathes heavily, cold sweat forming on his face. He takes a deep breath and then breath it out, covering his mouth partially with his right hand to pull himself together, to get a hold of his mind, properly processing the dream he just had.

This wasn't the first time either. He had experienced it twice before.

"No, actually this time was different…"

Backyard - Den Academy - Den City

It's lunchtime. Students either eat their lunch in the cafeteria, classroom, rooftop, or other places at school that they prefer. For Kento and the others, they decided to eat in the school's backyard, where there are less students gathering there, making it safe for them to have a discussion that they don't want anybody else to hear. After the dream he had last night, Kento decided to share this… phenomenon he is experiencing related to Divine Ignis, specifically the first two dreams that he had before, to Ai and Flame, hoping they can provide him with an answer.

Hearing Kento's story, Ai and Flame both reached one and the same conclusion.

"I think your mind is somehow connected to Divine Ignis' memories." Flame told Kento based on his conclusion after hearing Kento's experience. That was the only thing that would make sense, and he wouldn't say that was not a possibility.

"Divine Ignis' memories?" Kento wondered if it's like telepathy, when Flame put it that way.

"Us, Ignis, were born from our Origins ten years ago during the Lost Incident. You could say we are technically part of you. Like it or not, Ignis and their Origins are bound to influence one another." Flame explained. Though Flame couldn't say that he and Takeru had the same experience as Kento did with Divine Ignis, Flame knew that was the case. That was the only answer. When he first saw Takeru again, he instantly felt an unseen connection to him.

"As he said. Take me and Yusaku for example. Both of us are connected through Link Sense." Ai affirmed Flame's words.

"Link Sense?"

"It's a special ability that allows a person to sense and see things inside network, even when not logged in. Ever since the Lost Incident, I can sense the presence of the network. I don't know how to explain, it just happened." Yusaku explained in Ai's place. He shares the instances when his Link Sense was working, such as when he first saw Revolver and when he heard the pulse of the Cyberse Monsters.

"Wait, that sounds exactly like I am." Kento admitted. The more he heard Yusaku's description of the ability, the more he found the many similarities with what he experienced.

"Huh? Kento, you're saying you have Link Sense too?" Ai asked with interest. This is the first time he meets someone who possessed Link Sense like Yusaku.

"Yeah. Since the Lost Incident. Do you have one too, Takeru-kun?" Kento turned to Takeru. Since both he and Yusaku possessed Link Sense, he automatically thought Takeru might be the same as them.

However, Takeru shakes his head, denying having the same ability. And with that, the thought that all Lost Incident victims developed Link Sense was false. That means, the impact resulting from the incident differs for each Origin and Ignis. He and Yusaku just happened to develop the same ability from it.

"Anyway, back to your dream, what you've experienced in your dream is undoubtedly Divine Ignis' memories. Flame and I can testify that what you saw did happen back when we were still in the Cyberse World." Kento's dream was too much similar even to the smallest detailed to be called a mere dream.

"But if that's the case, something doesn't add up. Last night, the dream I had was different. It was a dream about Yusaku-kun, Kusanagi-san, and Ai speaking with Revolver." The first two dreams Kento had was Divine Ignis' time in Cyberse World, but this time, this dream has nothing to do with Divine Ignis, the said Ignis was nowhere to be seen.

"The three of us talking with Revolver?" Ai looks at Yusaku and Kusanagi, who also look at Ai with identical confused look.

Kento tells them in detail about his dream last night, in which Revolver revealed the truth of the Lost Incident and the Ignis, and described the place where they were talking, a place that was all too familiar for Yusaku, Kusanagi, and Ai.

"That's… that's when we confronted Revolver in his house during the battle at Tower of Hanoi!" Kusanagi recalled. No way he'd forgot about that confrontation.

"Yeah! That's exactly what we talked about with Revolver when we confronted him!" Ai confirmed Kento's dream.

"I don't get it. Why would I dreamed about you when my mind was supposed to be connected to Divine Ignis?" Kento wondered if there is something that he is missing for the dream to appear like that.

"Doesn't that mean Divine Ignis was watching when Fujiki-kun and the others confronted Revolver?" Kazue finally chimed in, voicing her opinion. From Kento's story, he saw things from the point of view of the Divine Ignis. Following that logic, that should mean Divine Ignis was watching the whole thing.

Kento and the others processed what Kazue said… and that makes sense. Divine Ignis was there when the confrontation happened. Since Kento saw things through Divine Ignis' eyes, that would explain why he dreamed about that moment.

"Then, he has been watching us the whole time! Why didn't he show himself then?!" Ai yelled out with confusion mixed with frustration. For five years he had been looking and waiting for him. He thought he might've hidden himself far away to avoid the eyes of Knights of Hanoi. Now, he learned that Divine Ignis had been nearby the whole time, watching them without doing anything.

"We're talking about Divine Ignis here. He must have his reason." Flame reminds. Ai's reaction was normal and he wouldn't make a jab at him for it, but both he and Ai himself knew that Divine Ignis wasn't the type who did nothing when his friends was in danger without plausable reason.

"…" Ai grumbles but doesn't deny what Flame said. He understands the most that Divine Ignis would never let his friends fight alone unless a certain circumstance forced him to stay quiet. He is still a bit angry though.

A phone ringtone interrupts their conversation. The phone came from the pocket of Kazue's uniform. She quickly picks it up after she saw who the caller was. She gestures to Kento with a nod, a simple gesture that Kento understand without having to be said, while the rest gives the two a questioning look.

"Father said that they have confirmed the schedule. We must go with him later after school." Kazue tells Kento once she ended the call.

"Where are the two of you going?" Takeru asks.

"To SOL Technologies." Kazue answered casually like she is planning to go to a mall with her friend.

The mention of the company completely shocked Yusaku and Takeru and their respective Ignis partners, all of them can't contain their surprised shout in response to her answer, wondering if they heard her right.

"SOL Technologies?!" Ai yells in disbelieve.

"Yes. My father has a meeting with the higher-ups of SOL Technologies since they're forming partnership. He decided to take us with him so that we can learn by watching how they're working in the lab." Kazue explained. They may have known her as the daughter of Hibiki Enterprise's CEO, but Yusaku and the others are

not up-to-date with their information about Hibiki Enterprise and SOL Technologies, including about their upcoming joint project.

"Wow. As expected from the successor of Hibiki Enterprise." Takeru is amazed.

"If you're going there, might as well use that opportunity to nab some intel from SOL Technologies." Flame suggested. SOL Technologies placed a bounty on them and already formed a team of bounty hunters to capture them. This could be an opportunity to get ahead of SOL Technologies by stealing information and then making a move before they could.

Kento and Kazue have already intended to do so the moment Kazue's father informed them of the possibility to go inside SOL Technologies' main office. Though Kazue's father would come and go to SOL Technologies often thanks to the partnership, there's no guarantee that he will always take the two of them with him, and it would be suspicious if they keep asking him to take them with him every time he is invited. That's why this would be a rare chance they have to get into SOL Technologies directly.

"We'll inform you once we're back if there's something." Kento promised that they'll do their best to get information from this visit.

SOL Technologies - Den City - After School

Kento and Kazue are sitting on one of the couches available in the lobby, waiting for the person who'd become their guide to pick them up. They often saw SOL Technologies building from the outside and could already tell the inside would be as big as it appeared. Despite their wide imagination, neither Kento nor Kazue ever imagined that inside SOL Technologies' main headquarters would have a clean efficiency yet is welcoming all the same. It has an ambiance that allows one to process the transition from home to a whole new world. Even Hibiki Enterprise's main headquarters is still more modest compared to this.

Sitting on the couch across them is Kazue's father, Daisuke Hibiki. He is a man in his thirties with short, slicked-back black hair and blue eyes. His attire consists of a turtle-necked black shirt underneath a gray-collared black business suit with matching jacket. Sitting next to him is a younger man wearing the same business suit, but it has grey color. The younger man is his secretary. The two of them are looking through documents while waiting until their guide finally arrived.

Walking in a quick motion approaching them is a tall man with brown eyes, olive skin, short black spiky hair, and a beard. His attire consists of a similar-looking business suit as the one worn by Daisuke and his secretary, but it was navy-blue in color paired with striped blue and white necktie.

"Pardon for my lateness, I am the Chief of Science Department, Takahashi Matsumoto." The man introduced himself to Daisuke's group, bowing politely as an apology for being late in picking them up before extending his hand to Daisuke, "It is a pleasure to meet you, Hibiki-san. I hope we can get along well together."

"The pleasure is all mine, Matsumoto-san." Daisuke accepted the handshake.

"Are they your children, Hibiki-san?" Matsumoto looks at Kazue and Kento who are standing behind Daisuke, not expecting to see youngsters accompanying Hibiki Enterprise's CEO.

"This is my daughter, Kazue. And this is her friend, Kento Hijiri. I brought them here because they are promising technicians and programmers who have been occasionally helping the enterprise. I believe they can learn more by watching us work. I can vouch for their skills, they won't be a hindrance." Daisuke introduced them with confidence. Kazue and Kento bows politely in response.

"Already helping the company at such a young age? You must be very proud of them, Hibiki-san." Matsumoto is genuinely impressed.

"Yes, they are." Daisuke affectionally patted Kazue's shoulder, smiling down at his daughter, and she smiled back at him.

"Very well. I shall guide you to our laboratory now. Please, follow me."

Matsumoto directs them towards the elevator, pressing the 9th floor button when they were inside. Reaching the designated floor, they arrive at the laboratory. Other than it being bigger, the laboratory is not so different from the one in Hibiki Enterprise headquarters. The number of staff working at the lab is also around the same number. Some are busy working on computers, and some are in the process of testing the machines they've developed. The atmosphere is exactly the same as when they were in Hibiki Enterprise.

One thing stood out, however. Something that won't be found in Hibiki Enterprise's lab. Not far from the front of the room, a photo is displayed. A photo of aging man with short gray hair combed to the back and green eyes. He wears a black suit, black tie, and white shirt underneath the suit like any businessman. Though it's only a photo, in Kento's eyes, the way the man curved his lips on both sides and the folds around his eyes showed a genuine smile expressing benevolence. Under the photo is a nameplate written "Yukihiro Gotoh".

"Excuse me, Sir, who is this person?" Kento asked, pointing at the photo.

"He is the founder of SOL Technologies, President Yukihiro Gotoh." Matsumoto answered. Looking at the photo pointed by Kento, Matsumoto's eyes softened, a glint of nostalgia reflected in his gaze, "Though it has already been 15 years since his passing, he is still a big inspiration for us all who had known him."

"You met him before he passed, Matsumoto-san?" This time, Kazue asked, becoming interested in the man in the photo.

"Yes. I was introduced to him by my mentor back then. He was intelligent and kind man. Even in his last days after he retired as the CEO, he never stopped supporting the company for the benefit of the people." Matsumoto's tone held transparent admiration for the said man, true to the words he said.

"… and yet this company covered up the Lost Incident for the sake of their own profit…" Kento murmured bitterly. He feels sorry for the founder who built the company with so much hard work from the very bottom only for the company to grow into an organization solely caring for money instead of helping the people. He wonders how SOL Technologies were during its old days before turning to its present state. He hope it wasn't as bad as it is now.

Hearing Kento's bitter murmur, Kazue leans closer to him and make sure that they are away enough from the adults, so they can't hear their conversation.

"Kento, do you think we should try to get information from Matsumoto-san? He is from different department, but maybe he knows something." Kazue asked, trying to distract Kento from his bad thoughts about SOL Technologies.

Other than helping her father, they must remember they have another objective in mind coming to SOL Technologies. Kento didn't forget that of course. However, they must choose their questions carefully so as not to attract suspicion. There were several things they must find out from SOL Technologies, but what they could do was limited since they must be careful not to give themselves away. What would be a way to strike up a conversation naturally without sounding suspicious?

"Kuri!"

From Kento's school bag, Saint Kuriboh jumps and hops out of the room, giving a brief wink at Kento, telling them to follow. It's so sudden that everyone is too surprised to react when the small round-shaped robot went out.

"Wait! Sain-I mean, Kuriboh!" Kento quickly runs off to catch up to Saint Kuriboh, almost slipping in calling the monster by its true name.

"We're sorry! We'll catch it and return immediately!" Kazue follows Kento behind him, running out of the room as well.

"Hold it, Kazue! Kento-kun!" Daisuke's call falls on deaf ears as Kazue and Kento already ran after the two robots in a hurry. Daisuke sighed and turned to Matsumoto, "I apologize on their behalf. I should've told them not to bring their pet robot here."

"It is okay. Once, my daughter also made the same mistake." Matsumoto chuckled gently as he assured Daisuke he was not offended. "That Kuriboh-like pet robot doesn't seem to be harmful, so I don't think it would cause trouble. Still, this place is big, I'm worried that they might get lost. I'll inform everyone in case they see them."

When they went out of the laboratory, Saint Kuriboh went towards one of the elevators. Unfortunately, the monster already went inside by the time they arrived, and they didn't know which between two of the moving elevators that Saint Kuriboh went into. One is going up, while one is going down. Kento and Kazue have no choice but to split up to look for Saint Kuriboh. Kazue will look at the upper floor, while Kento will look at below.

Kazue reaches the 12th floor where the elevator going up stopped at. She was going to ask the receptionist stationed there if they'd seen Saint Kuriboh waltzing its way to this floor, but there is a sign that they are on a break, and there is nobody else around, so she can't ask someone.

"May I help you?"

Until now that is.

Kazue almost jump from surprise when someone asked her from behind. She face a young woman with brown wavy hair and blue eyes. She is wearing a black coat, pink tie, black pants and black shoes like many SOL Technologies employees.

"I-I'm sorry. I'm looking for my friend's pet robot that's running away." Kazue quickly got a hold of herself. She shows the guest card given by Matsumoto to show that she has been given permission to enter the building.

"Oh, so you're one of the students who came with Daisuke Hibiki-san! Chief Matsumoto already informed us to report if we found Kuriboh-shaped robot or to help you if we run into either of you." The woman told her, having been called by Matsumoto just a few minutes ago, "We'll check the security camera in this floor to find your pet robot. I'll ask for Chief Zaizen's permission first."

Hayami walk towards a room not too far from them. Since Hayami didn't tell her to wait, Kazue follows her. The closer they aer reaching the room, Kazue heard voices coming from the room, and two of those voices are familiar to her. When they stopped next to the office' door, Kazue could hear clearer the voices who were speaking.

"Do we have any new leads to find Playmaker and the Ignis?"

"Not yet. However, we found a trace of some sort of gate in the restricted area of LINK VRAINS. It's the exact same location where the people Playmaker was chasing after escaped to."

"What kind of gate is it? It's not part of your program?"

"Unfortunately, no, Blood Shepherd. The gate appeared without even us knowing. Only until we investigated those two people Playmaker were after that we learned about the gate."

" *Go Onizuka and Blood Shepherd?!"* Kazue almost failed to control her expression and restrained her voice when she finally learned two of the three voices speaking inside the room.

"Please, wait for a moment."

The woman told Kazue as she is entering the office, interrupting the conversation between the three. The woman begins to explain about Kazue's situation and just as she told the girl, asks to be given permission to check on the security camera to see if her pet robot came in or not in this floor. Based on the footsteps, they are coming closer towards the door, so Kazue takes a step back. When the door opened, she is face-to-face with none other than Akira Zaizen, one of the voices she felt familiar with earlier.

"You're Hibiki-san's daughter, Kazue-kun, right?" Akira instantly recognized her, still remembering the few times they met when she accompanied her father.

"It has been a while, Zaizen-san. Thank you for helping my father all this time." Kazue greeted politely.

"I should be the one to thank your father for helping us with this collaboration project. And thank you for helping Aoi at school."

"Not at all. Aoi-san and I were just passing messages, we didn't talk much."

"You said you were looking for your pet robot, right? I'll check the security camera footage for you. Kazue-kun, just return and wait at the lab. I'll be sure to inform you if we found your pet robot." Akira told her with an assuring smile.

"Thank you very much, Zaizen-san." Kazue expressed her gratitude to the chief.

"Hayami, escort her back to the lab." Akira instructed his assistant.

The woman, Hayami, obeying her given order, ushers Kazue back to the elevator. While walking behind Hayami, Kazue take a peek behind her, watching Akira speaking with Go Onizuka and two people wearing similar outfit as him, and another man with light

purple hair and deep purple accents wearing sunglasses, maroon scarf around his face, white shirt with purple trim, brown belt, white pants and brown with green gloves, whom Kazue suspected to be Blood Shepherd.

Blood Shepherd joining the hunt on Playmaker and Ignis was old news already, but to think that Go Onizuka would join was surprising. She did wonder about his lack of appearance lately. Had he quit being a Charisma Duelist and changed profession to bounty hunter instead? Why? Didn't he fight together with Playmaker and Blue Angel against Knights of Hanoi? For what reason does he have that he willingly gives up his career as Charisma Duelist in favor of hunting down the person whom he fought side-by-side?

No. Go Onizuka's reason is a secondary concern. They have more pressing matters that need to be investigated quickly.

" *A gate at the restricted area… I must inform Kento about this!"*

Knight's office has a great panoramic view, enabling him to watch the city lights, the tall towers of glass, as if watching fireflies in the forest. The room, unlike most of the rooms in the headquarters, has nature touches, the furniture inside all made from wood, giving off a forest scent when one steps inside. It was also decorated with fresh flowers.

Knight is watching the sunset from the window of his office, having just finished his paperwork for today. Ever since the reappearance of Playmaker and the Ignis, as well as the new appearance of Holysaber who wields DIVINE-Attribute deck, Knight has his hands quite full, especially after Queen gave him the direct order to join the bounty hunters to capture the Ignis and retrieve DIVINE-Attribute deck. Alas, they don't have any lead to find their assigned targets just yet, so he is stuck with doing paperwork until further notice.

The door to his office then opens, revealing his assistant.

"Knight, Rook request for your presence." He informed.

"We have important guests coming here today, so don't call me by my title here." Knight tells him as he stands up from his seat, ready to meet up with his colleague.

"Yes. My apologies, Chief Shion Amagi." The assistant says while following his superior from behind.

"I was sure Kuriboh went here…"

Shion stops when he saw a boy in uniform turning his head left and right as if looking for something. He blinks in confusion as to why there would be a boy here, but quickly remembered that the CEO of Hibiki Enterprise was said to come here with two children, one was his daughter, and the other one was his daughter's friend who has helped with the company's work. This must be one of the two children. But why is he on this floor? He should be at the laboratory. Did something happen?

"Are you okay? You look troubled." Shion calls out for the boy who has his back turned behind him.

The boy stiffens when he heard his call, prompting him to turn around to face him. Now seeing the full view of the boy, he has unkempt short black hair with white highlights that falls over his lavender-colored eyes. The uniform the boy was wearing was Den Academy's high-school uniform.

The moment their eyes met; Shion is hit by a strange sensation that what he is now experiencing had happened before. A Deja vu. Most of all, the face of the boy he is facing right now was familiar, a face he feels he had seen before somewhere. Just seeing the boy's face, he feels suffocating, along with incessant throb in his heart.

"You are…"

NEXT CHAPTER PREVIEW

Chapter 6 - SOL's Security Force - Knight : Kusanagi finds a gate at the restricted area of LINK VRAINS that Ai and Flame recognized to be Wind Ignis' program. As Bohman and Haru disappeared in that area, Holysaber and the others decides to go there. On their way to the gate, they are confronted by SOL Technologies' bounty hunters and SOL's upper echelons, Knight. Knight challenges Holysaber, forcing him to a Duel.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I know that *Yu-Gi-Oh!* is a series about card games and Duels, but I believe that doesn't mean each chapter must have Duels in it and a breather is necessary. This chapter is one of them that I believe necessary before jumping to action again. For this chapter, I wanted to give some bits about Divine Ignis and the connection he shared with Kento. You also learned Knight's real name, Shion Amagi.

I added the flashback of Yusaku first meeting with Ryoken when they were children because I think Yusaku remembering that during his second Duel against Bohman seemed to come out of nowhere. Also, it has been mentioned a few times during the first season about Yusaku recovering his lost memories after the Lost Incident, but it was never elaborated further, so I decided to add that too.

And let me say this, I already came up with the name for Divine Ignis, which would be revealed in later chapters. For this reason, I apologize, but I won't be accepting name suggestions. As I said, I already planned everything from beginning to the end, all down to its last detail.

Thank you for your understanding.

Please do not forget to review this chapter. Your review is my motivation! (^_^)

SOL's Security Force - Knight

RESPONSE TO REVIEW:

Big thanks to ***tsukikami02, Ulrich362, HunterHQ, darktheking73, kaiser Younes*** for reviewing the previous chapter

I apologize for the long wait. My hand is already healed a week ago and I could write again, but this chapter release was delayed yet again because I got a fever and cold. As I told you before, I can't promise a consistent update date because I also have work and other things to do.

HunterHQ:

1. Because that only happened in LINK VRAINS, not real life itself. Not every single resident of Den City logs into LINK VRAINS. They may believe that they'll be safe if they don't log in to LINK VRAINS or move to another server. Putting myself in their shoes, that's what I'd think. And what happened with Bohman was mostly because people stupidly decided to log in to satisfy their curiosity. The public didn't know about the Ignis war and the danger Bohman brought.

2. I'm not sure about this myself, but I don't think Frog and Pigeon could record the part when Kogami appeared because the Duel froze at that time, most likely preventing Frog and Pigeon from recording. If it had been recorded, people would've talked a lot about Kogami, but since nobody talked about Kogami, I assumed that part didn't get into the recording. And to not make things complicated, I decided to go with that explanation for my fanfic.

3. Rather than there were only very few people who wanted to take the job, I think SOL Technologies only selected a few bounty hunters they believed to be skillful enough to hunt down Playmaker for hire, that's why there's only Go and his team and Blood Shepherd. Ghost Girl also got the offer, but she rejected it. As to why no one else tried

to go after Playmaker for the reward, remember that Playmaker rarely logs into LINK VRAINS unless it's necessary, so information about him is scarce, making it difficult to find him. Also, this is just my speculation, since Blood Shepherd, who is infamous among the bounty hunters, took the job, it's possible the other bounty hunters decided to step back because they don't want to compete with him, or possibly also didn't have the confidence to face Playmaker themselves.

4. I don't think Blood Shepherd exactly saw his real face because those bubbles formed from Takeru's memories were rather blurry, and he didn't hear his real name either because the flashback of Takeru's memories was not because Blood Shepherd saw the whole thing, but it was Takeru remembering due to the effect of Blood Shepherd's trap. Remember, Blood Shepherd didn't pay attention much to other fragments of Takeru's memories, only until he noticed the one that showed Despair from the Dark. That said, how it's going to be in my fanfic will be revealed later.

5. As for the rest, as I've said from the beginning, I have already decided everything about the cards and everything else, down to the details. To not spoil things, I won't comment any further about this.

darktheking73: Yes, there'll be some romance, but it won't be the main focus and will take a while.

kaiser Younes: I will only rewrite the Duels that I didn't find satisfying enough or necessary to change, while some of the Duels in the anime that I don't think need changing will be either skipped or written in a different way.

CHAPTER 6

SOL's Security Force - Knight

SOL

SOL no Chian Butai, "Naito"

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3 rd Floor - SOL Technologies - Den City

The moment Saint Kuriboh went out of the room and winked at him, Kento realized that Saint Kuriboh was trying to help him and Kazue get the opportunity to explore the building using the excuse of looking for a pet robot. As much as Kento appreciated Saint Kuriboh's good intention, just running away like that was reckless when they don't know much about what's inside the building itself. He hopes that Saint Kuriboh won't meet anybody who would harm it.

Fortunately, thanks to the keycard given by Matsumoto and Matsumoto's announcement regarding the missing pet robot, Kento got permission to walk around without being questioned so far as the other employees have been informed about his search. Unfortunately, there's nothing much that he could find that would be useful for Yusaku and the others. However, this won't be the only time they'd visit the company. Kento is positive that Kazue's father will bring them here again next time.

Kento narrows his eyes as he sees something round and white rolling to the left. Kento doesn't waste his time running after it, but only found another hall that at the corner was split into two paths. Kento scratches his head, starting to get exasperated by this unexpected hide-and-seek.

"I was sure Kuriboh went here…" Kento looks left and right, wondering which path he should take.

"Are you okay? You look troubled."

Kento stiffens at the voice from behind him. He quickly composes himself, remembering that there's nothing to worry about. If he explains his situation, he won't be suspected of anything. And it's not a lie that he is looking for his pet robot.

Kento turns around to give his explanation to the person calling him. Kento's opened mouth pauses when he sees the person behind him. A man with icy blue eyes and short grey hair. He wears a suit which consists of a blue coat with a darker one underneath, a white shirt, and a black tie. He also wears blue sports trousers and black shoes.

The moment their eyes met, Kento was hit by a strange sensation that what he was now experiencing had happened before. A Deja vu. Most of all, the face of the man he is facing right now is oddly familiar, a face he feels he had seen before somewhere. Just seeing the man's face fills him with unease.

"You're…" The man uttered as they face each other. It is then the younger man next to him speak up.

"Chief Amagi, I believe this boy is one of our guests from Hibiki Enterprise." He said, recognizing Kento.

"I am aware. Matsumoto already informed me that Hibiki Enterprise CEO brought two promising children with him." The man, Amagi, responded to the other person who seems to be his assistant.

"I-I'm sorry for disturbing you! I'll leave once I find it! I was sure that I saw my pet robot coming over here!" Kento bows down in apology, explaining to himself in a hurry that his earlier unease is swift away in preference to get himself out of his current situation.

"I understand your situation. I'll ask for someone to help your search-"

Amagi becomes silent, his eyes looking at somewhere else. Kento follows to the direction he's looking at and sees something round peeking out from behind the corner.

"Kuri…"

That voice is what convinced Kento that he has found the one he has been looking for.

"Kuriboh!" Kento opens his arms, prompting Saint Kuriboh to jump into his arms. The little Duel Monster robot looks up with guilty eyes. "There you are. Don't run away like that again."

"Looks like our help is unnecessary." Amagi smiles at the scene between Kento and the Kuriboh.

"Once again, I apologize for disturbing you." Kento bows down again in apology.

"It is fine. You're going back to the lab, correct? Let me escort you. We also have some business there. Since you've found your pet robot, we must make an announcement so that your friend won't look for it anymore." Amagi raises a hand at Asahi. Understanding his instruction, Asahi returns to the office to make a call to the receptionist, so they'll make an announcement that the pet robot has been found.

"Let us go." Amagi ushers Kento towards the elevator to return to the 9th floor where the laboratory is located.

"Speaking of which, we haven't introduced ourselves, haven't we? I am the Chief of Security of SOL Technologies, Shion Amagi. It is a pleasure to meet you." Shion finally introduced himself properly.

"M-my name in Kento Hijiri. I'm working part-time as a programmer at Hibiki Enterprise. The honor is all mine, Chief Amagi." Kento introduces himself rather nervously. He didn't expect to meet a high-ranking person like this. His position is Chief of Security, so that means he is Akira Zaizen's superior, whose rank is Security Manager.

If he holds such a high position, he must know a lot of things, perhaps even more than Akira. It'd be great if Kento could get intel from him. However, Kento cannot get rid of this unease that has been bothering him since the moment he laid his eyes on Amagi. This unease stops him from asking questions and reconsidering his attempt at getting information out of this person. Kento doesn't

believe this man is a bad person or even dangerous in the least bit, it's just something inside him is telling him not to let his guard down with this person.

Kento is so busy in his own mind that he doesn't notice Shion watching him from the corner of his eyes.

" *Kento Hijiri… huh…"*

Cafe Nagi - Central Plaza - Den City

In the end, other than the stunt that Saint Kuriboh pulled, nothing in particular happened during their visit to SOL Technologies. They discussed the joint project and returned home afterwards. Kento couldn't find anything useful for them but determined to find out somehow during his next visit. On the contrary, Kazue said she learned something important when she was looking for Saint Kuriboh, but withheld the information until they arrived at Cafe Nagi so she can inform everyone else at once.

For this afternoon, instead of his usual spot at the Central Plaza, Kusanagi decided to park Cafe Nagi near Stardust Road, where there are less people who come. When Kento and Kazue arrived, Kusanagi already set the table for them, Yusaku, Kusanagi, and Takeru already seated, waiting for them after Kento messaged that he and Kazue were on their way.

"Sorry to make you wait." Kento says as he takes a seat next to Yusaku, while Kazue sits on the chair across Kusanagi's.

"It's all right. Now that the two of you here, we can start discussing what we've found." Kusanagi takes out his pad and shows them the general structure of LINK VRAINS' tower.

LINK VRAINS Tower consists of two Main Shaft, the surface and the bottom. The Surface Main Shaft consists of four sub-areas called Islands. The first top is Riemann, the second top is Fields, the third

top is Hadamard, and the fourth is Ramanujan, which is the lowest sub-area of the surface signified by the warning line. The Bottom Main Shaft, which is the restricted area that nobody is allowed to enter, on the other hand, consists of three security layers, the first being Top Security Gate called Kerberos, the Middle Security Gate called Othrus, and the Bottom Security Gate called Tartarus.

"Yusaku, your opponents vanished in LINK VRAINS's restricted area. Around here." Kusanagi points at Tartarus, the Bottom Security Gate.

"Does that mean SOL Technologies is involved in this incident?" Yusaku looks at the screen with wonder.

"I don't know. But there's certainly something there. After checking the surrounding area, I found a shred of an unknown program." Kusanagi shows the said program that consists of an algorithm that Yusaku is somewhat familiar with.

"I've never seen this program, but… It's similar to a program in Ai's memories." Yusaku recalls. It's different, but the algorithm is not so different from the ones that he saw when looking through Ai's memory data.

At the mention of Ai's memories, Ai, Flame, and the others look closer at the program on the screen. Carefully looking at the program, Ai and Flame quickly recognized what the program is.

"An Ignis algorithm." Flame reveals.

"What?" Kusanagi is surprised.

"The Attribute is-" Flame is going to tell the Attribute of the program, but someone unexpected beat him to it.

"Wind." Kento finishes Flame's words, "It's Wind Attribute."

Everyone turns to Kento with their eyes widened. The sudden attention he got confuses the Olympios Stratos user who blinks at his friends in bewilderment by the look they're giving him.

"Kento, you understand this program?" Ai finally asks while pointing at the program on the screen.

"Huh? Yes. I mean, it's not that difficult of a program, so-"

"Not difficult?! Are you serious?! We're talking about Ignis algorithm here!" Ai exclaims incredulously.

"Kento, neither me nor Kusanagi-san can fully understand the Ignis algorithm. It's very difficult for us to decode it ourselves, even SOL Technologies can't, but you just saw it briefly and immediately understands it." Yusaku's voice when he explained was calm, but his expression barely composed.

"R-really?" Kento now understands their reaction. But to be honest to himself, he is the one who finds it difficult to believe that neither Yusaku nor Kusanagi understand the program when solving it was like reading a text message to him. In his head at least. He would never say it to them though. Saying this to Kusanagi and Yusaku would sound like he's mocking their programming skill or him being smug.

"You must be a programming genius. Your intellect rivals that of Dr. Kogami." Flame muses. He never thought he'd find another human other than his creator Dr. Kogami and his son Revolver who can understand the Ignis algorithm.

"Could this be related to Kento and Divine Ignis' mind being connected?" Takeru guessed. His technical sucks, but he at least understands that Ignis algorithm is an extraordinarily high-level program that not even skilled programmers like Yusaku and Kusanagi could solve, so for Kento to solve it in just one look is beyond them.

"I'm not sure that Ignis and their Origin can influence each other that much." Ai is doubtful that's the case. True, Kento's mind is somehow connected to Divine Ignis' mind, but to the point that connection allows Kento to understand Ignis algorithm is hard to believe.

"If that's not the case, then Kento being genius is the only other explanation that I can think of." Kazue makes another guess. Kento managed to master computer skills just within two months after he started learning after all.

"Whatever the reason, this is good news for us. Having someone else on our side capable of understanding the Ignis algorithm would give us more advantages." Flame says, deciding not to think too much of the reason and accepts the benefit from this revelation.

"Anyway, you're saying there's Wind Ignis over there?" Kento asks, redirecting the topic back before they get sidetracked further.

"Maybe, maybe not." Ai is unsure. Since it's only a shred of the Wind Ignis' program, there's a possibility the program is only the remains of Wind Ignis' program.

"Either way, we need to check that area." Yusaku stands up from his seat, directing everyone to start their investigation with the equipment inside Kusanagi's truck.

Kusanagi tried his best to analyze the fraction of data that they found with no luck. However, while analyzing, something interesting came that might help them with this predicament. Kusanagi showed them a mail that he received from a certain treasure hunter that most of them knew all too well.

"It's Ghost Girl!" Ai yells as he sees the mail. Just knowing the mail was sent by her gave him a bad feeling already.

It's info about the restricted area." Flame states, recognizing the content of the mail.

"And how to enter the area." Kusanagi adds.

"Why did she send that?" Takeru wonders. He doesn't know much about Ghost Girl, only heard a bit about her from Yusaku and the others. Based on their stories, she's not someone they'd call an ally, but they seem to have an amicable relationship at least.

"She wants us to go to that area?" That is the only thing Yusaku can think of. She knew that Playmaker was chasing after someone that escaped to the restricted area, hence, why she gave the intel. The question is why she wants them to go there? Since this is Ghost Girl they're talking about, he doubts it's simply out of good will.

"Don't! It's a trap! She's trying to trick us again!" Ai refuses to go along with whatever Ghost Girl is planning for them. They already fell for her trap twice, no way he want them to fall for the third time.

"It says a gate appeared in the restricted area that SOL Technologies hasn't identified." Kusanagi reads out the details of the mail he received.

"A gate? That's where he went?" Yusaku did wonder where the two abductors went to after bypassing the restricted area. Since LINK VRAINS is still SOL Technologies' domain, he doubts that they'll stay there for long otherwise SOL Technologies would've found them already. But if they're hiding behind this unidentified gate, the likelihood they're there is possible.

"No no no! You want to suffer again?" Ai objects strongly. He starts to remember all those times they got involved with Ghost Girl and it didn't end up well for them. The first time, they got the backdoor to SOL Technologies' databank, only to be welcomed by Akira and Ghost Girl already waiting for them. The second time, she tricked him into getting a bad card when they decided which path between two paths to take for each, which ended up with him and Playmaker running for their lives from a monster intent on killing them. The Dark Ignis learned from those experiences not to trust anything coming from the treasure hunter.

"But this info seems real. You can only get this info from SOL Technologies." Kusanagi argues. This information is far too detailed to be a false lead.

"So Zaizen is the source?" Yusaku deduces. When he met Ghost Girl at the data bank, she was with Akira Zaizen. Judging from their exchanges, Ghost Girl regularly took on jobs from him. This means rather than Ghost Girl, Zaizen is the one behind this. Ghost Girl sent this message under Zaizen's request.

"Zaizen wants you to go through the gate and search." Kusanagi thinks the same thing as Yusaku.

"Exactly."

"But SOL Technologies have bounty hunters. If you think about it, Ai is correct it's a trap." Though Kusanagi agrees that the information is real, he also understands Ai's point. Even if Zaizen's intention was to help them, the same couldn't be said to SOL Technologies itself. They willingly covered up the Lost Incident because they didn't want to lose their means on making money, and now they set a huge amount of bounty on Playmaker despite his good deeds. It's not a far-fetched speculation that they're setting up a trap.

"Yes! It's definitely a trap!" Ai is glad that someone is of the same thought as him. Unfortunately, this doesn't last long.

"I believe this information is legit." Kazue intrudes, earning her attention from everyone. She didn't reveal then, "I haven't told you this earlier, but when we were at SOL Technologies, I overheard Zaizen-san mentioning about an unknown gate in the restricted area to Go Onizuka and Blood Shepherd."

"Since Zaizen-san shared this information to the bounty hunters, there's certainly a gate there." Kento is convinced now that this information is legit. The security manager of SOL Technologies doesn't know about their identities as Holysaber and Ryuki. There's

no way he purposely leaked the information when Kazue was just happened to be there when she was looking for Saint Kuriboh.

With that one piece of information from Kazue, nobody but Ai thinks that it's a trap anymore. They don't have any other lead anyway, only that the mysterious kidnappers vanished in that area. Trap or not, they must investigate that gate no matter how dangerous it is.

"It's decided." Yusaku affirms their decision, much to Ai's dismay.

"I could only build one more room since my truck is not big enough, but one room should be enough for two people to fit in." Kusanagi gestures towards two doors on their side, red and blue. Before, there was only the blue one that only Yusaku used whenever he logged into LINK VRAINS. With Takeru joining them, Kusanagi built a new room a for Takeru to log in a few days ago.

"It's okay, Kusanagi-san. I already prepared everything for Kento and mine in anticipation of this. That's why we came with car today." Ever since she knew the inside of Cafe Nagi, Kazue quickly made some modifications to her car to make the same room as the one in Kusanagi's truck. That's why she drove herself and Kento with her car to go to SOL Technology and then to Cafe Nagi. Her father was using a separate car, so she and Kento could go freely without a problem.

"That's Hibiki Enterprise's successor for you…" Kusanagi says with astonishment. He sometimes envies rich people who have lots of resources that allow them to build high-tech devices, something that Kusanagi lacks with his limited income.

"You're sure your parents won't ask about those things in that car?" Kento asks. The inside of the car is not something that a normal high-school girl would have.

"I'm already 18. I'm eligible enough to get both a driver's lesson and a private car." Kazue answers nonchalantly.

"Wait, that car is your own car?! It's not one that you borrowed from your dad?!" Kento's mouth gape at the answer. No matter how rich Kazue's family is, Kazue's father is not the type who'd spoil his children. He can't believe that her father would just give her a car after she passed the test to get her driver's license.

"Of course. I designed and built it with my own two hands together with a few assistants from the Enterprise to add my personal touches." Kazue says proudly like she just created a wonderful piece of art. She knew that asking her father to give her a car would be too much to ask, so she decided that the best thing to do was build her own car. It's only right, and more fun that way. She could decide everything down to the smallest details. The result was very satisfying once she finished the car.

"… You know what? Let's just go inside and log in." Kento decides to just stop asking and get it done. Questioning Kazue when it comes to her enthusiasm for machines will only get him nowhere. Worst, she'll spend hours talking about machines. Better stop now.

"One room is still work-in-progress, so you can use the other room to log-in. I'll help Kusanagi-san in giving you support offline. I've prepared a guideline for the things I set in my car just in case." Kazue hands her childhood friend her handmade guidebook. Kento won't have any problem memorizing the whole guidebook.

As Kento and Kazue exit the truck to the latter's car, Yusaku and the others are watching the two of them until they close the door.

"Hmm… is Kazue what people said to be "machine maniac" no wait, was it "mechanical maniac"?" Flame muses.

Everyone else agrees with him. Until recently, Yusaku never spoke with Kazue, only saw her once in a while by a chance at school. His impression when he saw her was that of a friendly and mature senior. Seeing her so extremely fascinated almost like a child honestly surprised him. Takeru, who had also met her for the first time when he first transferred, also had the same first impression. It

doesn't look like she purposely trying to keep-up an image at school as the successor to Hibiki Enterprise, it's just the occasions where she'd show her excitement for machines never come for everyone at school to see.

"Whichever it is, it's very different from her image at school." Takeru says with a chuckle.

LINK VRAINS

Once logged into LINK VRAINS, Holysaber, Playmaker, and Soulburner went straight to the restricted area that they didn't get to enter before. There were security cameras on the way, but they managed to hide themselves using a board designed similar with the many floating islands, so they won't be perceived by the cameras. To allow Kusanagi and Kazue to continue supporting them offline, Ai is transmitting everything he sees to them.

They also got a trap evasion program that Ghost Girl taught Kusanagi and an updated LVSS installed to their Duel Disks. If it's a simple trap, the program's stealth function activates. Kusanagi also added a communication function that allows Ai and Flame to transmit everything they see to Kusanagi and Kazue, and an emergency escape program to the LVSS, but they can only escape once.

With the stealth program provided by Ghost Girl, they successfully passed through the restricted area.

"Ghost Girl really wants us to go to the gate." Playmaker comments as they passed through without trouble, unlike before.

"Not necessarily." Soulburner looks behind him, prompting Playmaker and Holysaber to look back. Just as Soulburner said, bounty hunters are right behind them.

"Playmaker! Found you!" Onizuka exclaims.

Go Onizuka is famous, so Holysaber has no trouble identifying him. Unlike before, his blonde hair loses its highlights and becomes messy, and he wears a green visor with a thin black lens. He wears a form-fitting forest-green leotard with grey shoulder pads that is belted at the cuffs under olive green torso armor fastened with straps over the shoulders and the SOL Technologies logo over his heart, which is decorated at the torso with a grey plate in a similar manner to the muscular plate he wore on his abdomen. He also wears sand-green leggings, and olive-green boots and gloves with grey soles and hands that are lined with red.

On the other hand, the two guys following behind him are not familiar faces. On his right is a young man with pink afro hair. He wears a dark green shirt, with protective blue and green gears, blue belt, dark green pants and dark green boots and green with black and blue glasses. On his left is another young man with spiky brown hair and wearing the same attire.

"Let's go! We'll shake them off!" Playmaker instructs Holysaber and Soulburner.

The three of them make some distance between them, but not separating themselves. However, judging from his excitement with Playmaker's return to LINK VRAINS, it seems that Onizuka is only interested in Playmaker alone.

"Kenmochi! Yoroizaka! Surround him from both sides! Don't let him escape!" Onizuka instructes his two partners. They follows his order and aims to block Playmaker's path, Kenmochi going to the right side while Yoroizaka to the left.

"Let's battle, Playmaker! We'll settle things today!" Onizuka challenges him.

"Playmaker, shall we Duel him?" Ai asks.

"No time for that. Let's shake them off!" Playmaker couldn't care less about whatever beef Onizuka has against him right now. Their

priority is to go to the gate where the guy who stole Jin's consciousness went to. Jin's safety is the most important. He doesn't want to make Kusanagi wait for too long.

"I won't let you escape!" Onizuka hit Playmaker's D-Board with his own, causing Playmaker almost losing his balance. He then orders Kenmochi and Yoroizaka to take the chance to surround their targets.

Below them, a space opens, many orbs coming out from the opened space. Flame immediately recognizes it as a trap. But instead of avoiding the trap by going to other sides, Playmaker realizes that they can make use of it to escape from their pursuers. And so, Playmaker tells Holysaber and Soulburner to keep going. The other Duelists realized Playmaker's intention and didn't question him. They keep moving down while dodging the orbs. With their riding skill, dodging the orbs is not a difficult task.

As they hoped, Yoroizaka and Kenmochi are unlucky enough to get hit by the traps, forcefully logging them out, which only leaves Onizuka pursuing them. With Yoroizaka and Kenmochi out of the picture, the trap is removed, making it easier for Onizuka to chase after them.

"Don't think you can get away from me!" Onizuka shouts as he speeds up.

"Onizuka is fired up!" Ai yells in exasperation at the Charisma Duelist's persistence.

"In can't be helped. I'll take him on-"

Just as Holysaber was about to shoot the Duel Anchor to lock Onizuka to a Duel with him, something hit his D-Board from the side. It was so fast that he couldn't even comprehend what was happening. When he got a hold of himself, he was already thrown quite a distance from Playmaker and Soulburner. His body

automatically held his D-Board tightly to prevent himself from falling off board.

"Holysaber!" Soulburner exclaims worriedly.

"I'm all right! Go on ahead of me! I'll catch up!" Holysaber told his comrades. Though reluctant to leave him behind, Playmaker and Soulburner also understand that a Duel is unavoidable. Winning it would be Holysaber's only way to proceed his way. They can only trust Holysaber to win and then catch up to them.

Holysaber looks at the one who hit him. He is a man wearing a black turtleneck shirt and black pants fastened by a belt. He wears a mask with the image of a horse. The bottom right side of his mask partially exposes his face. He has long blue hair tied up to a ponytail.

"It is nice to meet you, Holysaber. My name is Knight." The man, Knight, introduces himself politely, "I'll make this clear for you, so you won't misunderstand. I am not a bounty hunter. Let's just say that I am one of high executives of SOL Technologies."

"For a high executive personally going after me, SOL Technologies wants my deck so much?" Holysaber questions. He already expected that he'd be targeted due to his Deck, but for SOL Technologies to deploy one of their high executives is beyond his expectation. Bounty hunters are troublesome enough, now they even added a high executive to personally chasing him? Is SOL Technologies desperate to get their hands on the Ignis and Divine Deck?

"Precisely. To keep things peacefully between us, would you mind give up your deck to me?" Knight asks with a smile. Holysaber recognizes the smile as the same one that Kazue used when dealing with her father's clients. A smile of a businessman. Professional, but hardly genuine. Nothing more but a mask.

"Why bother asking when you already know my answer?" Holysaber retorts, readying his Duel Disk.

"It won't hurt to try." Knight drops his facade and readies his Duel Disk as well.

"Speed Duel!"

Holysaber LP: 4000

Knight LP: 4000

"I'm taking the first turn. From my hand, I activate Magic Card: Terraforming. I can add 1 Field Spell from my Deck to my hand." Knight activates his Magic Card, adding S-Force Bridgehead to his hand. The card is represented with a barren-looking planet partially transformed into the blue and green Earth.

"I activate Field Spell: S-Force Bridgehead. When this card is activated, I can add 1 S-Force Monster from my Deck to my hand." Knight immediately activates his Field Spell. A futuristic bridgehead emitting bright bluish light briefly appears before fading away.

"I summon S-Force Rappa Chiyomaru from my hand." Following the Field Spell's effect, Knight adds Rappa Chiyomaru and then summons it to his Main Monster Zone in Attack Position.

S-Force Rappa Chiyomaru (WARRIOR/DARK/EFFECT/ATK: 800/DEF: 1000/LV: 2)

The monster has the form of a black-haired girl with yellow shades at the edge of her pony-tailed hair. She wears a yellow sleeveless shirt underneath a black haori, grey-colored socks, and black long heeled boots. Her weapons consisted of a katana she placed between her obi and a fuma shuriken with seafoam green-colored blades.

"I activate Chiyomaru's effect. I can banish 1 S-Force Monster from my hand to return Chiyomaru to my hand and then Special Summon 1 S-Force Monster from my Deck in Defense Position." Knight banishes S-Force Edge Razor from his hand, returning Chiyomaru to

his hand again, and then Special Summon another monster to the zone next to Rappa Chiyomaru.

S-Force Pla=tina (MAGICIAN/DARK/EFFECT/ATK: 2200/DEF: 2000/LV: 6)

The monster has the form of a young woman with long silver hair. She wears a deep purple strapless dress covered by a long purplish white cloak with black fur around the neck. She also wears black stockings and a pair of long purple boots.

"If this card is Normal or Special Summoned, I can target 1 of my banished S-Force monsters and then Special Summon it." Knight chooses to summon Edge Razor that he banished following Rappa Chiyomaru's effect.

S-Force Edge Razor (CYBERSE/DARK/EFFECT/ATK: 1500/DEF: 1300/LV: 4)

Edge Razor has the appearance of robotic samurai with red hat and armors brimming with seafoam green-colored energy in resemblance to fabric that completes the hat and armor. He holds a futuristic katana as his weapon.

"A Cyberse Monster?!" Holysaber exclaims in shock as the data shows Edge Razor's Type.

"When we found the Cyberse World, we took some remains that'd be useful for us to incorporate them into the new LINK VRAINS and to certain Duelists among us. This is merely one of them." Knight revealed.

Holysaber glares at Knight. Ai and Flame lost their home and almost everything in it, only managed to salvage whatever they could find in the remains of their destroyed homeland. And SOL Technologies dared to use that opportunity to loot like petty thieves. Worse, they're intent on capturing Ai, Flame, and the other Ignis. They already built and launched the new LINK VRAINS from their looting with more

than enough players logging in, getting new Cyberse cards for their executives, and that's still not enough profit for them?

"If Edge Razor is Normal or Special Summoned, I can Special Summon 1 S-Force monster from my hand in Attack Position except Edge Razor." Knight summoned a monster in the form of a white robot with cloak and green cables serving as his hair to the zone next to Pla=tina and Edge Razor in Attack Position.

S-Force Gravitino (PSYCHIC/LIGHT/EFFECT/ATK: 2000/DEF: 1400/LV: 5)

"I activate Gravitino's effect. Once per turn, if this card is Normal or Special Summoned, I can add 1 S-Force card from my Deck to my hand." Knight added S-Force Chase to his hand and then set it.

"I end my turn." Knight concludes.

Holysaber analyzes Knight's field. Three monsters filling the Main Monster Zone and one set card in the Magic/Trap Zone. With three monsters on his field, he could've summoned a Link 3 Link Monster, but he didn't. Each of the three S-Force Monsters have considerably high ATK, but Holysaber doubt that Knight keep those monsters on his Field solely due to their ATKs. Either they have effects that will protect them or that face-down card is a Trap.

" *All right. Let's see what you have in mind."* Holysaber has decided what move he should make.

"My turn! With Scale 2 Olympios Stratos - Triantafyllo and Scale 8 Olympios Stratos - Kochyli, I set the Pendulum Scale!" Holysaber set the Pendulum Scale, allowing him to simultaneously summon Level 3 to 7 monsters.

Two columns of light appear on the left and right of the Magic/Trap Zones. Triantafyllo takes the form of a humanoid man of medium stature with blue eyes, long green vines on his head that serves as his hair. He wears a long black coat with a gold collar closed at the

front with a rose-shaped brooch and a long red ribbon tied to the waist, white pants and black espadrilles. Kochyli takes the form of a humanoid female mermaid with a crimson armor.

"Pendulum Summon! Come forth, my monsters!" Holysaber summoned three monsters to his Main Monster Zone, all of them in Attack Position.

Olympios Stratos - Myrties (CYBERSE/DIVINE/EFFECT/ATK: 1700/DEF: 500/LV: 5)

Myrties is a humanoid male monster with white vest over a green shirt, with green gloves. He is equipped with leather shoulder pauldrons, elbow guards, and hip armor with floral myrtle carvings.

Olympios Stratos - Spourgitis (CYBERSE/DIVINE/PENDULUM/ATK: 2000/DEF: 1000/LV: 6/ PS: 3)

Spourgitis is a sparrow-like monster with a pair of indigo eyes, brownish white feathers, and wings that sprouts bluish energy.

Olympios Stratos - Diamanti (CYBERSE/DIVINE/PENDULUM/ATK: 1300/DEF: 600/LV: 4/PS: 6)

Diamanti is a humanoid female with shoulder-length silver hair, wearing white blouson dress with orange-colored diamond as a necklace.

"Pla=tina's effect. Each of my opponent's monsters in the same column as one of my S-Force monsters loses 600 ATK."

Olympios Stratos - Myrties ATK: 1700 = 1100

Olympios Stratos - Spourgitis ATK: 2000 = 1400

Olympios Stratos - Diamanti ATK: 600 = 0

" *With them, I'll summon-"* Holysaber's thought is interrupted by Knight's declaration.

"If you're thinking about Link Summoning your ace monster, think twice." Knight said before he then points to Edge Razor, "Edge Razor's effect. Each of my opponent's monsters in the same column as one of my S-Force monsters cannot be used as material for the Link Summon of a Link-3 or higher monster."

"I get it know. Link-1 and Link-2 Monsters in general tend to have lower ATK and Effect, so the probability of overpowering monsters with higher ATK is slim. On top of it, any monster I summoned to Main Monster Zone right now will have their ATKs lowered by 600. It's a combination that both preventing me from summoning powerful monsters and weakening mine at the same time." Holysaber admits that the limitation placed on him put him at disadvantage, but he still has his way to turn the situation to his favor.

"That means, as long as it's lower than Link-3 Link Monster, I can still perform Link Summon." Holysaber knows which Link Monster to summon on this turn. Fortunately, he has a monster with suitable Effect on his side.

"Appear, the circuit that lights up the future!" Holysaber summons the Link Summoning portal.

"Arrowhead confirmed. The summoning condition is at least 1 Effect Monster! I set Spourgitis and Diamanti on the Link Markers! Circuits combined!" Holysaber set Spourgities on the Bottom Link Marker and Diamanti on the Bottom-Right Link Marker.

"Link Summon! Appear, Link 2, Olympios Stratos - Glyko Peristeri!" Holysaber summons a white-colored dove-like monster with a pair of blue eyes and glowing silver linings on its body and wings.

Olympios Stratos - Glyko Peristeri (CYBERSE/DIVINE/LINK/ATK: 1600/LM: Bottom, Bottom-Right/LNK: 2)

Since there's no monster in the other Link Monster Zone, Pla=tina's effect won't affect Glyko Peristeri, so its ATK remains.

"Gravitino's effect. Each of my opponent's monsters in the same column as one of my S-Force monsters is banished when it leaves the field." Knight declares as Myrties and Diamanti were on the same column as Edge Razor and Pla=tina before they left the field.

"?!" Holysaber's Spourgitis and Diamanti that are supposed to be sent to the Extra Deck are instead banished, preventing Holysaber to summon either of them with his Pendulum Scale on his next turn.

"Pendulum Monsters are sent to the Extra Deck when it leaves the field and can be summoned many times as long as your Pendulum Scale is active. I watched your Duel against Blood Shepherd and came up with this countermeasure." Knight smirks from seeing Holysaber's surprised look. While he's still not sure of how far Holysaber's usage of Pendulum Summon, he went with this strategy in anticipation that Holysaber perform Pendulum Summon. If not, there's always a monster whose effects can be activated in the Graveyard, so he has nothing to lose doing this.

"Then Battle! I attack S-Force Edge Razor with Glyko Peristeri!" Holysaber begins his Battle Phase. It was a difficult choice for Holysaber. All three S-Force Monsters has troublesome Effect. However, after considering the possibility in the long-run, Holysaber determined that eliminating Edge Razor first is the best option as without Edge Razor, he'll be able to summon a Link Monster with higher Link.

"At this moment, I activate Glyko Peristeri's effect! During Battle Phase, my opponent's monster's ATK is halved and Glyko Peristeri gains ATK equal to the opposing monster's lost ATK!"

S-Force Edge Razor ATK: 1500 = 750

Olympios Stratos - Glyko Peristeri ATK: 1600 = 2350

Glyko Peristeri spreads its wings wide and then flip it down, sending dozens of its sharp feathers straight down towards Edge Razor. The samurai-like S-Force Monster tries to block the feathers by deflecting it with his sword, but the feathers are too many for him to deflect at once. He can't last long as the feathers finally pierce him, destroying Edge Razor.

Knight LP: 4000 = 3400

"I end my turn." Holysaber finished. Since the Battle Phase has ended, Glyko Peristeri's ATK reverts to normal.

Olympios Stratos - Glyko Peristeri ATK: 2350 = 1600

Holysaber looks at the remaining two monsters on Knight's field. He still must deal with them. With Edge Razor out of the picture, he'll be able to Link Summon a Link 3 above monsters on his next turn. But that also depends on what Knight will do on his turn now.

"I'm glad that you're not letting your guard down just because you succeeded in destroying Edge Razor." Knight comments, smiling in satisfaction at Holysaber.

Holysaber narrows his eyes at Knight. His opponent is confident, but he doesn't induce an air of arrogance for someone of a high rank. He's almost like Akira, only without the friendliness that the security manager has. His compliment was not sarcasm either, it was genuine. Despite challenging him, Knight also doesn't give off hostility like the unknown assailant and Blood Shepherd did to him. That's precisely what makes Holysaber feel unsettling about Knight. Are all SOL Technologies' executives like him? Holysaber doubts that's the case. This could be an act on Knight's part.

"If you're a high executive, you must know about the Lost Incident, right?" Holysaber asks.

"Yes. I am aware. I was already employed when that incident happened, though in a slightly lower position than now." Knight

confirms, his smile disappears. "Since you brought that up, are you one of the seven children like Playmaker?"

"Yes. I am." Holysaber replies. It's only a matter of time until SOL Technologies knows his connection to Lost Incident, so he saw no reason to keep it a secret.

"I suspected that's the case. Then, that Duelist named Soulburner must be one of the victims too." Knight already deduced since their first appearance days ago that they're Lost Incident victims. Playmaker is one and partnered up with the Ignis based on him. It's natural that Soulburner and Holysaber would be the same.

"But I don't see an Ignis with you. The Ignis based on you didn't come to your side after Cyberse World was destroyed?" Knight questions. Because Playmaker and Soulburner both have Ignis with them, he assumed Holysaber would have an Ignis with him. However, so far, he hasn't seen any sign of Ignis coming from him.

"SOL Technologies covered up the incident because they don't want to give up on the Ignis. Because thanks to the Data Material created by the Ignis, your company has grown so much and made a lot of money…" Instead of answering, Holysaber recalls what he heard from Playmaker about SOL Technologies' course of action after the Lost Incident ended. He refuses to let this matter slide when he's now speaking with one of the people who were there in the aftermath of the incident.

"Now, you already launched the new LINK VRAINS and get Cyberse cards. That should be more than enough for SOL Technologies to earn profits even without the Ignis in your custody. Despite that, you're still not satisfied? You still want more? How much do you have to take until you're satisfied?" Holysaber asks with concealed anger. Knights of Hanoi might be the ones responsible for the Lost Incident, but SOL Technologies who covered up the incident for their own selfish greedy purpose was equally guilty.

"I can't speak up on behalf of the company. Even as a high executive, I can't understand what my bosses are thinking in their minds, back then and now. All I can tell you is purely from my own perspective." Knight was still 18 years old at that time. A young man with idealistic view, filled with dreams that he wished to fulfill. No doubt just like how Holysaber used to be before the incident. However, reality of the society he lives in made him realize that the world is not a kind place. His dreams, his ideal, they're nothing more but naivete. They're nothing more but childish prattle in the eyes of adults.

"That's just how it is once you become an adult and work in the society we are living in right now." Knight answers.

"What do you mean by that?" Holysaber doesn't understand what Knight is trying to tell him.

"We're living in a capitalist society. In this society, wealth is everything. The amount of money you have determines your position. When people live in such society, they'd grow into people who satisfy their greed by taking more, even at the expense of others, if it means making money. SOL Technologies is the prime example of it." Knight says with a smooth voice like a teacher giving a lecture.

"Once you have the mindset that money is everything, your only thoughts are how to make sure you'll never lose that money. And the only thing to keep that is by making more. So what if a few children got hurt? As long as SOL Technologies do not lose their customers that allows their cash flows, then the end justifies the means. That's how SOL Technologies is in my perspective." Knight's face doesn't show any particular emotion. Holysaber can't read him at all that it's unnerving. This person is good at controlling his facial expression.

"And you don't think it's wrong?" Holysaber asks again.

"I have mouths to feed, so quitting SOL Technologies is out of the question. Curse me all you like, if the company wishes it, then I'll do

whatever it takes to get things done." Knight answers bluntly. Telling people to quit a job is easy, but most of the times, finding and getting a new job is difficult. There's no guarantee the next job they'll get would be better. Knight understands this fact from seeing the employees working at SOL Technologies, especially the lower-rank ones.

Holysaber's intuition tells him that Knight was being honest when he said he has nothing against him. He's simply doing as he was ordered to do. Holysaber also can't deny what Knight said. Everything Knight told him about SOL Technologies makes sense. The fact that they covered up the Lost Incident to the point of infecting Dr. Kogami with a virus to silence him was clear evidence of how the company is ruled by greed. It's truly revolting.

"It's nothing personal, Holysaber. That's just how business is." Knight says before beginning his Draw Phase.

"My turn. I change S-Force Pla=tina's position to Attack Position." Knight changed Pla=tina to go on offensive, ready to attack at any time.

"From my hand, I summon S-Force Orifice." Knight summoned a futuristic cowboy-like monster with a pair of blue-eyes wearing a matching deep brown hat and cloak and red scarf, a wristband with a device that capable of forming a red saber rope to climb, and a gun that shoots laser.

S-Force Orifice (CYBERSE/LIGHT/EFFECT/ATK: 1800/DEF: 1000/LV: 4)

"Appear! The circuit of strength and agility!" Knight summoned the Link Portal and then set Gravitino on the Bottom Link Marker.

" *He sacrificed Gravitino that will banish my monsters when it leaves the field?"* Holysaber narrows his eyes with suspicion.

"Link Summon! Appear, Link 1, S-Force Nightchaser!" Knight summoned humanoid female robot with a helmet that has cat-like ears covered in black cloak with a purple symbol. She wields black daggers with purple-colored edge as her weapons.

S-Force Nightchaser (CYBERSE/DARK/LINK/ATK: 800/LM: Bottom/LNK: 1)

" *He finally Link Summoned. He could've summoned this Link Monster from the beginning. What kind of monster this Link Monster is?"* Holysaber stares warily at Nightchaser. He wouldn't underestimate it just because it's only a Link-1 Monster.

"Battle! I attack Olympios Stratos - Glyko Peristeri with S-Force Orifice!" Knight declared Battle Phase.

S-Force Orifice leaps towards the Link Monster, pointing his gun as it charges up power, ready to make a shot.

"During Battle Phase, my opponent's monster's ATK is halved and Glyko Peristeri's ATK is increased equal to that ATK!" Holysaber activated Glyko Peristeri's effect. However, Holysaber feels uneasy. Knight already knew his Link Monster's effect from the previous Battle Phase, but he still ordered an attack. He's scheming something and Holysaber knows it.

Knight's next declaration proves him right.

"I activate S-Force Orifice's effect! When a monster my opponent controls activates its effect, I can banish 1 S-Force Monster from my hand and destroy that monster!" Knight banished a copy of Edge Razor from his hand, allowing Orifice to shoot down the Link Monster.

Orifice shoots a red laser from his gun, it shoots right through Glyko Peristeri, destroying it. Holysaber clicks his tongue. It was unfortunate that his suspicion was correct, partially, since he only suspected Nightchaser, not expecting Orifice to have that kind of

effect. With his Link Monster gone, now he only has Myrties on his field.

"You don't look that surprised. You must have suspicion about my monsters. Too bad that you don't have the means to stop my attacks." Knight proceeds with his second attack by using Pla=tina with Myrties as his target.

Pla=tina forms two circular energies around her arms. The winds starts to gather around Pla=tina. Once it's sufficient enough, Pla=tina shapes them into twisters and directs them at Myrties. The Olympios Stratos Monster tries to protect herself by using a shield made from one of her flowers. As each seconds passes, however, the petals are blown away one by one until the shield is too small to defend her from the destructive wind, destroying her.

Holysaber is nearly blown away by the wind, holding tightly to his D-Board to prevent himself from falling.

Holysaber LP: 4000 = 2900

"Lastly, I attack directly with Nightchaser!" Knight doesn't stop and continue his third attack.

Nightchaser throws her daggers, striking Holysaber three times and almost throws him off the D-Board if not for Holysaber's reflexes.

Holysaber LP: 2900 = 2100

"When an S-Force Link Monster I control inflicts Battle Damage, I can activate Trap Card: S-Force Reinforcement. I banish 1 S-Force Monster from my Deck to Special Summon 1 S-Force Monster that was banished in my previous turn to my field, but it cannot attack until the end of my turn." Knight opened his face-down card, summoning Edge Razor that he banished due to Orifice's effect to his Main Monster Zone in Attack Position.

" *Damn it. I just got rid of it and there's another one replacing it."* Holysaber grits his teeth. So much for Link Summoning Link-3 or above Link Monster on his next turn.

"I'm sorry that I foiled your effort by summoning another copy of Edge Razor." Knight apologized sarcastically.

"I end my turn." Knight concluded.

"My turn." Holysaber looks at the card he drew. His eyes widen as a newfound hope fills his chest. That's right. He still has a chance if it's with this card. He'll have to pay a lot, but he doesn't have any other alternative.

"I activate Magic Card: Holy Sacrifice! I send a DIVINE-Attribute Monster from my Extra Deck to the Graveyard and then lower my LP equal to the half of that monster's ATK." Holysaber sent Elpizo Harpe from his Extra Deck to his Graveyard at the cost of his LP lowered by the half of Elpizo Harpe's ATK, which is 1250.

Holysaber LP: 2100 = 850

"I activate Myrties' effect. When this card is in my Graveyard, I can banish it to Special Summon a Link Monster in my Graveyard." Holysaber banished Myrties to Special Summon Elpizo Harpe that he just sent to the Graveyard, summoning it to the Main Monster Zone in Attack Position.

Olympios Stratos - Elpizo Harpe (DIVINE/CYBERSE/LINK/ATK: 2300/LM: Bottom-Left, Top, Right)

Edge Razor's effect only applies solely to Link Summon a Link-3 Monster or above. There's no restriction that says he can't summon Link-3 Monster or above at all. Then, as long as it's not a Link Summon, he can summon Link-3 or above Monsters through other means. He's lucky to have drawn the Magic Card, allowing him to send his ace monster to the Graveyard, away from Edge Razor's effect.

However, due to Pla=tina's effect, Elpizo Harpe's ATK is decreased by 600.

Olympios Stratos - Elpizo Harpe ATK: 2300 = 1700

"I see. You sent your ace monster to the Graveyard so you can summon it to your field without having to resort to Link Summon, which is restricted due to Edge Razor's effect. Clever." Knight gives an applause at Holysaber's idea. His opponents before Holysaber were too focused in destroying Edge Razor to Link Summon Link-3 or higher Link Monster that it slipped their minds they could've found another way.

"I appreciate your genuine compliment. In return, I'll show my respect by not holding back." Holysaber points to Triantafllyo and then, "I activate Triantafllyo's Pendulum Effect! Once per turn, when I have exactly 1 Link Monster on the field, I can Special Summon a Level 7 or lower monster from my Deck to the zone pointed by the Link Monster's Link Arrow but at the end of turn, that monster is returned to the Deck."

Olympios Stratos - Timios Kyknos (DIVINE/CYBERSE/EFFECT/ATK: 2500/DEF: 1000/LV: 7)

Holysaber summons a swan-like monster with pure white feathers and a pair of pink eyes. Its wings are attached with silver armor decorated with pink-colored pearls and the top of its head covered by a silver diamond-shaped ornament with pink crystal. Due to Pla=tina's effect, Timios Kyknos' ATK is decreased by 600.

Olympios Stratos - Timios Kyknos ATK: 2500 = 1900

"I activate Kochlyi's Pendulum Effect! Once per turn, I can set a Magic or Trap Card from my Deck to my Magic & Trap Zone!" Holysaber set a card at the one remaining slot between Triantafllyo and Kochlyi.

"I activate Elpizo Harpe's effect! When this card points to a monster, it gains an ATK equal to the difference between that monster's ATK and my current LP!" Holysaber's LP is at 850 due to Holy Sacrifice's effect, and Timios Kyknos, pointed by Elpizo Harpe's Link Arrow, currently has 1900 ATK, so Elpizo Harpe gains 1050 ATK.

Olympios Stratos - Elpizo Harpe ATK: 1700 = 2750

" *So that's his aim. He knew that even if he summoned his ace monster, Pla=tina's effect would lower its ATK. That's why he used Holy Sacrifice not only to place his ace monster in the Graveyard to be summoned through Myrties' effect, but also to considerably increase his ace monster's ATK through its effect by increasing the gap between his own LP and Timios Kyknos. Not only that, since Elpizo Harpe is summoned from Graveyard, it's placed in Main Monster Zone, meaning it's able to attack Nightchaser since they're in a different column."* Knight

"Battle! I attack S-Force Nightchaser with Elpizo Harpe!" Holysaber declares Battle Phase.

Elpizo Harpe slashes down his sword at Nightchaser, who blocks the attack with her daggers. However, the daggers soon crack from the force of Elpizo Harpe's sword and eventually destroyed to pieces, allowing Elpizo Harpe to slash Nightchaser into two, destroying the Link-1 Link Monster.

Knight LP: 2400 = 450

"After Elpizo Harpe inflicted Battle Damage, my opponent receives damage equal to the ATK of the monster pointed by Elpizo Harpe!" Holysaber adds as Elpizo Harpse points his sword towards Knight, ready to use Katharsi Stream.

"I activate S-Force Reinforcement's effect! I can banish this card to negate all Effect Damage until the end of this turn!" Knight banishes his Magic Card, preventing Elpizo Harpe from using his effect.

"Next, I attack S-Force Orifice with Timios Kyknos!" Holysaber declares his second attack.

Timios Kyknos envelops its body with bright pink energy, gradually turning into a big pink light while retaining its own shape. Timios Kyknos flies towards Orifice at full speed, striking through the cowboy-like S-Force Monster until he is no more.

Knight LP: 450 = 350

"I activate Timios Kyknos' effect! When this card leaves the field due to an effect, I gain LP equal to the damage inflicted to my opponent this turn." Due to Triantafllyo's Pendulum Effect, Timios Kyknos is returned to the Deck as Holysaber's turn ends. Since Holysaber inflicted 2050 damage from this Battle in total, he gains LP equal to that number. And Elpizo Harpe's ATK returns to normal following Timios Kyknos removal from the field.

Elpizo Harpe ATK: 2750 = 1700

Holysaber LP: 900 = 2950

Holysaber managed to almost wipe out Knight's field. Now, Knight only has Pla=tina on his side. With his low LP, this turn would be Knight's only chance to try turning the tide. Holysaber can't relax just yet. As long as his opponent still has LP no matter how little it is, he won't let his guard down. That's why he set a card to be safe.

"Let me ask you this, Holysaber, what is your purpose coming to the restricted area of LINK VRAINS? Together with Playmaker and Soulburner no less. Since Knights of Hanoi is no more, are you planning to cause trouble to SOL Technologies as a revenge for covering up the incident?" Knight inquires. This question surprised Holysaber, but he give his answer nevertheless.

"No. We're chasing someone else who escaped to this restricted area and that's all I'm going to tell you." Holysaber won't bother with

explaining the details surrounding Jin and the two guys who stole his consciousness data. There's no point in letting Knight know.

"It never crossed your mind to get revenge on SOL Technologies?" Knight asks again, emphasizing the part that he's most curious about.

Holysaber blinks at the second question. Does Knight suspect that he's resentful of SOL Technologies for covering up the Lost Incident and wants revenge against them after questioning Knight about it? It would be a lie to say that he is not resentful, but the anger and disappointment he holds are not big enough to want to enact revenge against SOL Technologies. Only selected people at SOL Technologies were responsible for the cover-up. Other employees like Akira have nothing to do with it. If he tries to take down SOL Technologies, the other employees who have no connection to what happened ten years ago will face the consequence as well. And most importantly…

"SOL Technologies holds 30% of the network infrastructure. I'm not a fool who doesn't know the consequence that would follow if something were to happen to SOL Technologies. I'm not willing to take that risk and ruin innocent people's lives." Holysaber admits.

"I see… That's quite a letdown." Knight sighs in disappointment.

"Huh?"

"My turn." Knight ignores Holysaber's confusion and begins his Draw Phase. Looking at the card he drew, he keeps it in his hand and then extends his right arm to the front.

"I activate Skill: S-Force Reload! I can banish 1 Level 5 or higher S-Force Monster from my Deck and gain 200 LP for each Level of the banished monster!" Knight banished Level 6 S-Force Lapswell, gaining 1200 LP in total.

Knight LP: 350 = 1550

"From my hand, I summon S-Force Rappa Chiyomaru." Knight summons the second copy of Rappa Chiyomaru in Attack Position to the zone next to Pla=tina.

"Appear! The circuit of strength and agility!" Knight summons the Link Summoning portal and then sets Rappa Chiyomaru to the Bottom Link Marker.

"Link Summon! Appear, Link 1, S-Force Nightchaser!" Knight summons another copy of Nightchaser to the Extra Monster Zone in Attack Position.

"I activate S-Force Nightchaser's effect. Once per turn during my Main Phase, I can target one of S-Force Monsters I control to shuffle it back into the Deck, and then Special Summon one of my banished S-Force Monsters." Knight shuffles back Pla=tina to his Deck in exchange of summoning Lapswell that he banished through his Skill.

S-Force Lapswell (FIEND/LIGHT/EFFECT/ATK: 2400/DEF: 2500/LV: 6)

Unlike the other S-Force Monsters that Knight summoned before, Lapswell has the appearance of a futuristic demon. Its whole body is deep blue except for its abdomen to its thighs which are orange, and its chest and head area are light blue. The inside of its demonic wings is orange with glimmering green circular lines.

"If Lapswell is Special Summoned, I can target one S-Force Monster in my Graveyard and Special Summon it." Knight revived Pla=tina in Attack Position, keeping Elpizo Harpe's ATK at 1700 due to her effect.

"I activate Lapswell's second effect. Once per turn, I can banish 1 S-Force Monster in my hand, to destroy all my opponent's monsters in the same columns as my S-Force monsters!" Knight banish the third copy of Rappa Chiyomaru in his hand to activate Lapswell's effect.

Lapswell opens its wings. The glimmering lines in its wings, tails, and chest begins to shine. A blue spatial portal forms above the field and begins to suck Elpizo Harpe into it. The Olympios Stratos Link Monster tries to hold his ground, but finds his body is starting to get sucked into the portal.

"I won't let you! Trap Card: Olympios Aspida! Until the end of turn, I can negate my monster's destruction!" Holysaber opens his face-down Trap Card, forming a shield that protects Elpizo Harpe, stopping the monster's destruction.

"Even if it's not destroyed, you still take damage! Battle! I attack Elpizo Harpe with Lapswell!" Knight declares his Battle Phase.

Lapswell flies towards Elpizo Harpe, raising his fist. He lands a punch at Elpizo Harpe's sword that is blocking him from making a direct blow at the Link Monster. However, the impact of the punch manages to push back Elpizo Harpe.

Holysaber LP: 2950 = 2250

"Next, I attack with Plati=na!" Knight declares his second attack.

Pla=tina once again forms two circular energies around her arms, gathering the winds around Pla=tina. Once it's sufficient, Pla=tina shapes them into twisters and directs them Elpizo Harpe, who blocks the twisters with his sword. The forces of the twisters cause a crack on Elpizo Harpe's sword, but the Olympios Stratos monster endures it.

Holysaber LP: 2250 = 1750

"I end my turn." Knight concludes.

Holysaber looks at his situation. He only has Elpizo Harpe Main Monster Zone and two Pendulum Monsters in his Magic & Trap Zone. He doesn't have any card in his hand. He can't perform Pendulum Summon because he doesn't have any face-up Pendulum

Monsters in his Extra Deck no thanks to S-Force Gravitino's effect banished them on the earlier turn.

Knight has turned the tide to his favor. Now, Holysaber is the one in a pinch. He has no choice but to bet on everything on his Draw Phase. Everything depends on this one Draw. In the end, he can only trust that his Deck would respond to him.

" *It comes to this, huh. I was so close until Knight used his Skill…"* Holysaber gasps softly as he is submerged in epiphany.

That's right. This is Speed Duel. Just like Knight able to use a Skill, he should be able to use a Skill too. This avatar is also provided with a Skill. However, there are two problems. First, the risk of activating his Skill. It'll cost most of his LP and cards to activate it. Then again, considering his current situation, it's either do or die, so he'd prefer taking risks than just accept defeat. Second, and the most important factor, the Data Storm. Like Playmaker, he needs Data Storm to activate his Skill. But there's no Data Storm to be seen.

" *What should I do…? Without Data Storm, I can't use my Skill…"*

Holysaber feels violent pulsation in the head and carotid. Like violent twinges and lancing. Pressing down with each step like a weight on the occipital. Exploding pain; as if it were driving into the brain; worse when bending forward, as if the brain is dribbling outward, shoving its way out the front.

"Wind Ignis, how do you usually control the Data Storm?" Divine Ignis asked the Ignis flying not far from him.

The Wind Ignis has a light-green body with tinted green, wind-shaped markings on his head and torso, and curved lines on the hands, elbows, knees, feet and face. He has fuchsia eyes and shapes like horizontal ovals. His body is notably like Ai's body with large shoe-like feet and his head is like Ai's, but the top is longer and curves inward.

"Why do you ask that? You know how to control Data Storm like all of us." Wind Ignis asks back in confusion at the sudden question.

"Yes, but the way you control Data Storm is different from us even though we're using the same algorithm. It makes me curious, since you're also the best at it among us, Ignis." Divine Ignis answered. Eyes, reflecting genuine desire to know.

"Hmm… to put it simply, I feel that the Data Storm is offering me support." Wind Ignis answers.

"Offering support?"

"Data Storm is not just an ordinary wind made up of data. Within them are the souls of Cyberse themselves. Because I know they are there, I know that by calling forth Data Storm, those souls will be there for me." Wind Ignis explains.

As demonstration, Wind Ignis summoned several Data Storms, moving them like they're dancing together with his monsters. It's like watching aircraft performing stunt flying. Windy then joined his monsters. They move ever onward in the hallowed space between heavens and Earth until they land upon the brightly lit grass field, feet kissing the earth with a small and joyous bounce.

Wind Ignis laughed cheerfully together with his monsters.

Watching the scene also brought smile to Divine Ignis' face.

Holysaber opens his eyes. His mind recalls the algorithm that Kusanagi showed him before. With that algorithm as the base and that memory, Holysaber concentrates. He carefully tries to sense them. Listening to them. The souls of the Cyberse within the winds.

BADUMP

He hears it. Their pulse. The voice of their souls, trying to reach out to him.

"Come! Data Storm!"

Holysaber flies up, extending his right arm as he speeds up. The wind came as the fluid braille of the gods, as if the pulse within, the pattern of the raindrops carried, were a code. The silver hues were like molten silver, swirling in steady and radiating ripples until it gradually forms into silverish purple twister coming, responding to Holysaber's call, embracing him into it.

"What?!" Knight can't believe what he's seeing with his eyes. "He's controlling the Data Storm?!"

" *How is it possible?! Only the Ignis and Revolver can control Data Storm. No, could it be that he solves the Ignis algorithm?! Even though nobody in SOL Technologies ever succeeded?"* Knight can't think of any other possibilities that would allow Holysaber to control Data Storm. If the boy did solve the Ignis algorithm, then he severely underestimated the boy's intellect.

"Skill Activates! I reduce my LP to 100 and destroy all cards in my hand and field to add random cards in the Data Storm to my hand or Deck equal to the number of cards I destroyed!"

Holysaber LP: 1750 = 100

Holysaber has three cards on his field and a card in his hand from his Draw Phase, making it 4 cards in total. The storm destroyed Elpizo Harpe, Triantafllyo, and Koschyli on the Field, and then a single card in his hand. Holysaber reaches out as four cards start to form.

"Storm Blessing!"

Holysaber takes the materialized four cards, coming out from the Data Storm with two cards in his hand.

"I activate Magic Card: Divine Pendulum! When I have no cards in my Pendulum Zones, I can add 2 face-up Divine Pendulum Monsters with different names from my Extra Deck to my hand!" Holysaber uses the first of his four new cards to return Triantafyllo and Kochyli to his hand right after it was destroyed due to his Skill cost.

"With Scale 2 Olympios Stratos - Triantafyllo and Scale 8 Olympios Stratos - Kochyli, I set the Pendulum Scale!" Holysaber sets the Triantafyllo and Kochyli like he did before.

"I see, you're planning to summon a new monster through Pendulum Summon. That other card in your hand is your new monster you got from the Data Storm." Knight speculates.

"Who said I'm going to Pendulum Summon?" Holysaber smiles cheekily, confusing Knight. He proceeds by revealing the second card in his hand and activates it, "I activate Magic Card: Corinthian Fusion! I can use the Pendulum Monsters in the Magic/Trap Zones as materials to Fusion Summon a DIVINE Attribute Fusion Monster!"

"What?! A Fusion Summon?!" Knight is stunned.

"Alluring red rose. Tranquil seashell. Unite and give birth to the goddess of beauty!"

Triantafyllo and Kochyli turn into a stream of red and blue colored particles that gather at a singular point, which bursts into multiple-colored vortexes. The vortexes then combine into one, and become a single color of pink, the particles assemble, gradually forming into the Fusion Monster.

"Fusion Summon! Appear, Level 7, Olympios Stratos - Velo Afroditi!"

Olympios Stratos - Velo Afroditi
(CYBERSE/DIVINE/FUSION/ATK: 2400/DEF: 2000/ LV: 7)

Velo Afroditi takes the form of a beautiful humanoid female with a long strawberry blonde hair and a pair of red eyes, partially covered

in pure white veil with floral embroideries. She wears an Empire-style white dress decorated with seashells and pearls. She also wears a bracelet made from roses.

"However, with that ATK, it won't be enough to wipe out my LP." Knight points out. Even if Afroditi succeeded in destroying Pla=tina that has lower ATK, he'll still survive this turn.

"No. I will end everything now." Holysaber retorts as he turns to Afroditi, "I activate Afroditi's effect! Once per turn, I can lower all my opponent's monsters' ATKs to 0! Agapi Cradle!"

"What?!"

Knight can only watch helplessly as Afroditi summons petals of flowers that rain down Knight's whole Field, weakening Lapswell and Pla=tina. The two S-Force Monsters fell on their knees and slouched down, losing their energy completely.

S-Force Lapswell ATK: 2400 = 0

S-Force Pla=tina ATK: 2200 = 0

"This is the end, Knight! Battle! I attack Lapswell with Afroditi!" Holysaber declares his last Battle Phase.

Afroditi covers Lapswell's body with her veil, immobilizing the S-Force Monster. Above Lapswell, dozens of thorny roses appear, and they all shoot down, piercing Lapswell's entire body at the exact same moment until the S-Force Monster's body cracks and eventually explodes into bits.

Knight LP: 1550 = 0

Knight falls from his D-Board as his LP is depleted.

He lost.

He thought he had been careful, but he now admits that he had underestimated Holysaber. First, the Data Storm, second, the Skill that adds cards from the Data Storm, and now, a Fusion Summon. Holysaber is not just specialized in Link Summon and Pendulum Summon like he initially deduced. He should've known that since he had only seen Holysaber Dueling once, he has yet to see everything that Holysaber could offer. Holysaber didn't even use his Skill against Blood Shepherd. He had been overconfident. And that's what led to his defeat.

"That's… a fine move… Holysaber…" Knight says before he gets automatically logged out, leaving Holysaber by himself.

"I thought I was a goner…" Holysaber sighs in relief, falling on one knee from exhaustion.

However, he also experienced a new feeling after he used his Skill for the first time. His eyes are alight, he feels his every muscle needs to move, to jump. He giggles. Everything tickles him as funny. That moment was nerve-wracking but at the same time gave an amazing sensation that Holysaber is not sure how to describe in words.

"Kuri…" Saint Kuriboh comes out from Holysaber's Duel Disk, looking at him with concern.

"Don't worry, Saint Kuriboh. I'm just a bit tired." Holysaber smiles gently at the white Kuriboh to assure it. He stands up again.

He can't rest yet. He must catch up to Playmaker and Soulburner. He might've defeated Knight, but there's still Onizuka. And speaking of bounty hunters, they mustn't forget Blood Shepherd. Though they didn't see him together with Onizuka's team, it's possible that Blood Shepherd is hiding somewhere, waiting for the right moment to attack.

"Let's go."

Holysaber continues down towards where the mysterious gate is located.

NEXT CHAPTER PREVIEW

Chapter 7 - A Fraction of Anger: Holysaber and the others meet the Wind Ignis, Windy, who then requests them to take care of Blue Girl and Ghost Girl who are following behind them. Offended by Blue Girl's audacity, Holysaber proposes a Tag Duel between himself and Soulburner against Blue Girl and Ghost Girl.

LIST OF ORIGINAL CARDS

Holysaber's Cards:

Olympios Stratos - Triantafllyo (CYBERSE/DIVINE/PENDULUM/ATK: 1000/DEF: 800/LV: 5/PS: 2): Once per turn, when you have exactly 1 Link Monster on the field, you can Special Summon a Level 7 or lower monster from your Deck to the zone pointed by the Link Monster's Link Arrow but at the end of turn, that monster is returned to the Deck *(Pendulum Effect)* .

Olympios Stratos - Kochyli (CYBERSE/DIVINE/PENDULUM/ATK: 1200/DEF: 2000/LV: 3/PS: 8): Once per turn, you can set a Magic or Trap Card from your Deck *(Pendulum Effect)* .

Olympios Stratos - Myrties (CYBERSE/DIVINE/EFFECT/ATK: 1700/DEF: 500/LV: 5): When this card is in your Graveyard, you can banish it to Special Summon a Link Monster in your Graveyard.

Olympios Stratos - Spourgitis (CYBERSE/DIVINE/PENDULUM/ATK: 2000/DEF: 1000/LV: 6/ PS: 3): Effects to be added later.

Olympios Stratos - Diamanti (CYBERSE/DIVINE/PENDULUM/ATK: 1300/DEF: 600/LV: 4/PS: 6):

Effects to be added later.

Olympios Stratos - Glyko Peristeri (CYBERSE/DIVINE/LINK/ATK: 1600/LM: Bottom, Bottom-Right/LNK: 2): During Battle Phase, your opponent's monster's ATK is halved and Glyko Peristeri gains ATK equal to the opposing monster's lost ATK.

Olympios Stratos - Timios Kyknos (CYBERSE/DIVINE/EFFECT/LV: 7): When this card leaves the field due to an effect you gain LP equal to the damage inflicted to your opponent this turn.

Olympios Stratos - Velo Afroditi (CYBERSE/DIVINE/FUSION/ATK: 2400/DEF: 2000/ LV: 7): Once per turn, you can reduce all your opponent's monsters' ATK to 0. Another effect to be added later.

Holy Sacrifice (Magic Card): Send 1 DIVINE-Attribute Monster from your Extra Deck to the Graveyard and then lower your LP equal to the half of that Monster's ATK.

Corinthian Fusion (Magic Card): With this card, you can Fusion Summon a DIVINE-Attribute Fusion Monster by using Pendulum Monsters in the Magic/Trap Zone as materials.

Olympios Aspida (Trap Card): Olympios Stratos Monster you control cannot be destroyed until the end of turn.

Knight's Cards:

S-Force Reinforcement (Trap Card): Banish 1 S-Force Monster from your Deck to Special Summon 1 S-Force Monster that was banished in your previous turn to your field, but it cannot attack until the end of your turn. When you're about to receive Effect Damage while this card is in your Graveyard, you can banish it, negate that Effect Damage.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This definitely won't be the last you'll see Knight. He's pivotal for the later part in the story. And finally, Holysaber used his Skill, Storm Blessing. I had a hard time deciding his Skill. I don't want it to be too identical to Storm Access, so I made the Skill enables Holysaber to gain more than just one card and not just monsters. However, I am aware just leaving it at that would be too OP of a Skill for him, so I added a cost to activate the Skill like Soulburner's Burning Draw to make it riskier to be activated.

Also, if you're wondering the last card that Holysaber got from the Data Storm but hasn't used it yet, that card will be later in Chapter 9.

I hope I didn't make a mistake in writing the Duel. If there is a mistake without me knowing that you noticed, please do inform me and I'll immediately revise it.

Please don't forget to review this chapter, tell me your opinion about this chapter. Your review motivates me to keep writing.

TRIVIA

- Corinthian Fusion is based on Corinthian order, the last developed and most ornate of the three principal classical orders of Ancient Greek architecture and Roman architecture.

- Translation of the Greek words in this chapter:

1. Myrties: Greek for "myrtles".

2. Spourgitis: Greek for "sparrow".

3. Diamanti: Greek for "diamond".

4. Glyko Peristeri: Greek for "sweet dove".

5. Timios Kyknos: Greek for "honest swan".

6. Triantafllyo: Greek for "rose".

7. Kochyli: Greek for "seashell."

8. Aspida: Greek for "shield".

9. Afroditi: Based on Aphrodite with Greek writing and spelling.

10. Velo: Greek for "veil", referring to one of Aphrodite's attributes shown in art.

11. Agapi: Greek for "love".

A Fraction of Anger

RESPONSE TO REVIEW:

Big thanks to ***tsukikami02, Ulrich362, Kaiser Vision, Guests,*** and ***HunterHQ*** for reviewing the previous chapter!

Guest 1: Yes, Takeru will use his Synchro Monster in later chapters.

Kaiser Vision: Thank you very much. I'm glad that you have enjoyed reading the story so far. I'll do my best writing this story until the end.

Ulrich362: Thank you for pointing those out. I forgot to fix those parts. I'm sorry that the girls will lose, but I truly promise that they'll get their satisfying victories in later chapters. I can only ask for your patience until that time comes.

Tsukikami02: Yeah, Kazue being a mechanic was partially inspired by Yugo and Rin when they built their D-Wheel. Lol

HunterHQ: Even if there's backlash or boycotting, it's not enough to put the company down. Season 3 showed SOL Technologies was still holding 30% of the network's infrastructure, which is the very proof that the company is still very influential and successful. Also, you should be able to see that Playmaker being placed a bounty is not considered a big deal to the general people even if he has saved the network. They still enjoy logging into LINK VRAINS without a care and not making any complaints about Playmaker's bounty. Either they believed it's none of their business or they believed that Playmaker won't be easily captured.

I've already mentioned in my previous chapters that SOL Technologies and the other Lost Incident children won't be neglected. They'll have more roles, but still much later. And Yusaku's mother was already mentioned at the beginning of chapter 5. I won't

answer more than this to avoid spoilers. I'll say this again, I already planned everything down to the last details.

No, I won't make Pendulum hybrids. Link Summon is still the main focus of *Yu-Gi-Oh! VRAINS'* summoning method and I'd like to respect that aspect, so I won't be adding any Pendulum hybrids to avoid a shift in focus of the summoning method. And on top of already having Divine Deck with multiple summoning methods, giving Kento/Holysaber Pendulum hybrids feels it'll make him overpower and I don't want to do that. If I were to give a Pendulum hybrid, it would be strictly to Link Pendulum and nothing more.

I already mentioned before that I planned an original story arc. No further answer to avoid spoilers.

Guest 2: Sorry, but I can't answer that question either because it'll be spoiler.

For anonymous reviewers, please write down a name instead of leaving it as just "Guest", so I can at least differentiate if this is the same anonymous reviewer or a different one. Thank you.

I hope you'll enjoy reading this chapter!

Chapter 7

A Fraction of Anger

(Ikari no Ichibu)

Shion's Office - SOL Technologies - Den City

Shion finds himself back in his office after he was defeated by Holysaber. Opening his eyes, the first thing in his view is his

personal assistant, Isamu Toriumi, who has been waiting for him the whole time while observing everything what happened online. They could've joined Akira in the Command Room, but Shion preferred to do things on his own accord.

"You're back, Chief Amagi." Isamu welcomes his superior.

"Have you recorded the Duels as I've told you to?" Shion asks his assistant, not minding the concern given by his assistant. He only has a minor headache, nothing serious.

"Yes. I recorded the Duel between you and Holysaber, Soulburner and Onizuka, and Playmaker and Blood Shepherd. I've rewatched them myself for a double check, and positive there's nothing missing in the recording." Isamu shows the three CDs containing the recording of the said Duels.

"Good work. I'll watch it later for my next Duel against him." Shion stands up from his chair. The sudden movement causes him to feel sluggish momentarily. If not for his assistant holding him up, he would've fallen.

"Chief, please don't push yourself. Take a sit even if it's just for a few minutes." Isamu beseech his superior. Unfortunately, Shion merely raises his hand to insist that he's fine. Isamu can only sigh in exasperation.

Isamu has been working as Knight - as Shion Amagi's assistant for three years now. It has only been three years, but Isamu feels that the job has taken up most of his lifetime with all the workloads given to him. But he could never bring himself to complain because the company pays well. If you dig into the handy glossary, you can see that there's pretty fierce competition for the position of a high executive's assistant. This might be considered bragging, but becoming an assistant at Isamu's age is a huge deal and was proof of his bright and promising future.

However, Isamu is more than often wondering if keeping this job is the right thing to do.

How does it feel to work under Chief Shion Amagi? If someone ask him that, he'll give a straight honest answer:

It's a constant abuse.

Chief Amagi tells him to do things that are humanly impossible and reasons him it's part of Isamu's training. Sometimes he psychologically tortures him through the means of overworking or ditching his work on him. Sometimes he hit him or challenged him to a Duel as a form of discipline. Just trying to keep up with him is exhausting because he's freakishly strong. To put it in a simple description, Chief Amagi has no idea how to go easy on his coworkers.

Also, he loves weird-tasting food that Isamu has been wondering countless times from what kind of store that he bought those foods. Where on earth he found them. What kind of taste buds he has. To make it worse, Chief Amagi always makes him eat it first to test it. And by "makes him", he means shoves it into his mouth.

But his intelligence and skill as Knight are real deal, and he seems to be really fixated on his work, so Isamu honestly respects him. Even though he's clearly still suffered from the backlash of the forceful logout after that last attack, the Chief of Security remains strong.

" *But I wish he'd also consider his assistant who has to clean up after him."* Isamu laments in his mind. Assistants like Hayami and the other two who worked for Rook and Bishop seems to not be having the same trouble as he is. How envious he is of them.

"What do you think of Holysaber, Isamu?" Shion inquires.

"He's certainly a skilled Duelist on Playmaker's level. His victory against Blood Shepherd was not a fluke or luck. And the fact he could control a Data Storm means that he has solved the Ignis

algorithm and used Data Material. He's not an ordinary programmer. I dare say his programming skill is above any of us in SOL Technologies." Isamu is not sure if it's okay for him to express his opinion like this because it might sound like he was degrading SOL Technologies employees. But he can't lie either. Chief Amagi can tell if he lies.

The programmers working for SOL Technologies are by no means amateurs or only have average skills, all of them are true professionals carefully picked among the best. However, not even them able to crack the Ignis algorithm. It takes a genius at Dr. Kogami's level to be able to achieve that feat.

"Excellent observation. You're fully aware of the difference of skill between Holysaber and our employees." Shion praises Isamu. Many employees at SOL Technologies are prideful to a fault. They don't like it when someone from outside their company does better than them and tries to make themselves look better by making excuses. That's why Shion likes Isamu. He doesn't hesitate to accept facts no matter how bitter it is.

Although, there's one thing about his assistant that needs fixing…

"Speaking about Holysaber, it's not like you to hold back in that Duel, Chief Amagi. You could've done more to defeat Holysaber. Or… could it be you're not in your game today? You did look like you're taking a liking on Holysaber." Isamu is trying to lighten up the mood since his superior looks so stiff for some reason. Sadly, he has chosen the wrong topic to joke about. With the words already left his mouth, it was too late for him to realize his mistake.

Isamu has a bad habit of taking the light of an experience and making it into a joke without properly reading the other person's mood. He means well, only that he needs to learn to know when the joke is appropriate.

This case is one of the many that he failed to realize not to joke about.

Shion is smiling down at his assistant, but his smile doesn't reach his eyes. He places a hand on his right shoulder. The nails of the hand placed on Isamu's shoulder dug deep and nearly crushed the poor assistant.

"Isamu-kun, recently I bought a spicy miso flavor chocolate. Perhaps you'd like to try some?" Shion's other hand is reaching to his pants pocket and brings out the said bizarre-tasting chocolates. He threateningly extends the chocolate close to Isamu's face, as if gesturing to forcefully open his assistant's mouth and shove the chocolates into his throat.

"I'm sorry. I spoke out of turn. My lips are tightly sealed." Isamu quickly shuts his mouth. His face pales at the sight of the bizarre-tasting snack in superior's hand. He was already traumatized by what happened last time when the Chief of Security forcefully fed him with curry-flavored cookies after his big mouth accidentally told his superior to stop being a workaholic and get himself a wife.

Shion smiles in satisfaction at his answer and removes his hand.

"I'll see how Zaizen and the bounty hunters are doing. You stay here and prepare to watch the Duel recordings. You better already finished when I return." Shion orders his assistant. Isamu didn't waste any second rushing into the personal auditorium to prepare everything, bringing the CD recordings with him.

Unknown Server - LINK VRAINS

After defeating Knight, Holysaber proceeded down until he arrived at what appeared to be a corridor. So far on his way, he hasn't encountered any traps or other bounty hunters, making it smooth for him. It didn't take long until he finally saw familiar figures riding inside the same corridor ahead of him.

"Playmaker! Soulburner! You're okay!" Holysaber calls out to his friends, finally catching up to them.

"Yeah! We defeated Blood Shepherd and Go Onizuka!" Ai says proudly while expressing his relief at Holysaber's arrival.

"I knew it, Blood Shepherd also came…" Holysaber is not pleased that his bad feeling came true. And knowing Blood Shepherd, this won't be the last time they'll encounter him. At least, Playmaker managed to defeat him for now.

"You're here means you also defeated your opponent." Flame comments on Holysaber's presence. They were surprised and worried when the guy in the mask suddenly dragged Holysaber away from them. Though they knew Holysaber's skill, it was still worrying to be separated so suddenly like that.

"Who was that guy? Another bounty hunter?" Soulburner asks. Kazue already told them about Onizuka and Blood Shepherd, but not that masked guy.

"No. He was called Knight. He claims to be one of SOL Technologies' high executives." Holysaber reveals.

"SOL's high executive?!" Ai exclaims in shock.

"Looks like SOL Technologies is quite desperate to get their hands on the Ignis and my Deck." Holysaber adds, explaining how Knight was personally tasked to join the bounty hunters in capturing the Ignis and get the Olympios Stratos Deck.

"But what are they being desperate for? It's not like they're going bankrupt or anything." Ai wonders. It was already troublesome having to deal with Onizuka and Blood Shepherd, and now they also must watch out for SOL's higher executive. He doesn't want to imagine that more higher executives would come for their neck next time. What makes them so obsessed with getting the Ignis and Divine-Attribute Deck?

"We'll figure that out later. We're close to the gate now." Playmaker dismisses the discussion as the corridor eventually ends, and the

three duelists end up in a vast central space with several hexagons of data floating around.

"What is this place? Is our target still further ahead?" Ai looks at the wide deep blue space around them.

They keep flying until they see a green spot on the horizon. Getting closer, the green spot resembles a whirlpool with a bright white light in the center.

"Is that the gate?" Ai asks.

"Bohman must've gone through that," Playmaker surmises.

Playmaker leads the way through the gate as Soulburner and Holysaber follows behind him, entering the gate. Unlike the deep blue space from before, once they went inside, they are like inside a green tunnel of data passing by them on all sides.

"How far does this go?" Ai asks as they keep going and still not seeing any change, "Are we safe?"

"We can't go back anymore," Playmaker responds. They've already gone too far to turn back now. Not that they have any intention to do so. This is the only clue they finally found about Bohman, about Jin. They won't

"Exactly. You'll understand when we get there." Flame said.

Playmaker and Holysaber then sense something ahead of them. As they go further, they're engulfed in a bright light, as if something is pulling them. The next thing that happens, they're already out of the tunnel and are welcomed by strong gusts of wind surrounded by large canyons. The sudden change of weather and environment almost caused them to panic.

To protect themselves from the wind, the trio raises the tip of their D-Boards and keep their balance the best that they can. Unfortunately,

the wind is too strong for them and it's only a matter of time before they fall should they keep this up.

"This wind is dangerous!" Ai screeches as Playmaker struggles to safely ride the wind while barely avoiding the cliff in front of them.

"Stay focused. If you crash into the cliff, you'll be hurt!" Flame warns them.

"I know!" Soulburner tries his best to be careful, keeping his eyes focused on his surroundings to maneuver his D-Board properly. Sadly, it's getting harder and harder the more he proceeds, and seeing Playmaker and Holysaber, they're not faring any better.

"It's only a matter of time until we fall!" Ai can see that their human friends are reaching their limit. There's only choice left. "Flame! It's up to us!"

"Seems so." Flame understands what Ai is telling him to do and has no objection to it. That's the only way they could think of to safely pass this canyon.

Ai and Flame put both of their arms forward. Purple light appears from their palms. Seeing the light, Holysaber's eyes lit up, realizing what they're trying to do. He positions himself and then places his right arm forward.

Ai and Flame summon the Data Storm, forming a shield that blocks the wind from their human partners.

"You're using the Data Storm to negate the wind," Playmaker realized. Though only slightly, his tone sounds impressed. "I see. That's a good idea."

"Right? Praise me more!" Even under these circumstances, praise from his partner is something he'll happily accept. It's not every day Playmaker would praise him. However, he couldn't bask himself in this praise as he remembers something very important.

Unlike Playmaker and Soulburner, Holysaber doesn't have his Ignis partner with him. That means nobody can help him create a shield from Data Storm.

"Wait! Holysaber doesn't have-"

Ai gasps when he looked at his left side and saw something he could hardly believe. Seeing Ai's reaction, the others couldn't help but to take a glance and they immediately expressed the same reaction.

Holysaber is forming a Data Storm on his own, shielding himself from the wind.

"Holysaber, you can control the Data Storm?!" If Flame had a mouth, he'd be gaping wide right now.

"I studied your algorithm on my way here. I still need to learn though. This is the best I can do." Holysaber admits. Having to create a Data Storm to block the wind while riding his D-Board is a daunting task. A slip in concentration would cost him.

Akira's Office - SOL Technologies - Den City

Akira is sitting on his chair with his chin resting on the back of his hand while facing four people standing in front of him, namely Onizuka and his two teammates, and Blood Shepherd. Immediately after they were defeated and got logged out, Akira had Hayami checked on their conditions. Fortunately, it doesn't look like they're suffering any damage. The only thing that ruined their moods is the fact that they have failed their hunt, at least in the case of Onizuka and Blood Shepherd. Kenmochi and Yoroizaka didn't even get the chance.

"Why did you activate the trap when we're chasing after them?! That trap got us too!" Yoroizaka makes his complaint.

"That's right! If you just leave it to us, we would've cornered them!" Kenmochi also expresses his dissatisfaction.

Akira's face is as calm as usual, but he is actually feeling a little guilty for what happened. He purposely set that trap to hinder the bounty hunters' pursuit. It's quite a gamble since it'll also endanger Playmaker, Soulburner, and Holysaber, but Akira had faith that they'd get through it. He also needs to keep up his image as the loyal dog of SOL Technologies. He can't let anybody know that he has his own agenda regarding the Ignis. That's why he had asked Emma and Aoi to secretly follow Playmaker and get the Ignis before SOL Technologies can. He can't trust SOL Technologies to handle the Ignis.

That said, he still feels bad because he presented himself as Security Manager who requested the bounty hunters' help, keeping them in the dark that he never really supported them.

"Hmph. You have nobody but your incompetence to blame." Blood Shepherd snorts at Kenmochi and Yoroizaka's protest. Playmaker and his friends and Onizuka have shown how they dealt with the trap. But these two instead were making excuses for their own failure. Blood Shepherd can only think of them as nothing more than pathetic, "For people who are working as a team, your teamwork needs more polishing. Never mind supporting Onizuka, you guys are just a deadweight."

"What did you say?!" Kenmochi growls at Blood Shepherd. Yoroizaka is also glaring at him. However, they are stopped by Onizuka who raises an arm in front of them.

"Blood Shepherd, I'll admit it's their own fault, but they are far from being deadweights. I personally picked them to support me because I trust them." Onizuka says in his teammates' defense.

Sensing the tense atmosphere between Onizuka and Blood Shepherd, Akira knows that he must put a stop to them before things escalate for the worse. The sound of the door opening along with

footsteps entering the office gains everyone's attention; they all turn to the door to see a new occupant has just arrived.

"Am I interrupting something good?" Shion asks nonchalantly.

"Who are you?" Blood Shepherd asks.

"Let me introduce him to you. He is Knight, the Chief of Security who also joining us in pursuing Playmaker's team." Akira stands next to Shion as he introduces the Chief of Security.

"The Chief of Security himself joining the hunt?" Blood Shepherd looks at Knight suspiciously.

"I merely following the order from my boss. And you don't need to worry. Just like how you prefer to do things alone, I also prefer to do things on my own accord." Shion addresses this not only to Blood Shepherd, but also to Onizuka, Yoroizaka, and Kenmochi. Even though they were called a group, they don't have what it takes to work together.

"In any case, I believe we should share what we learned from our Duels, no?" Shion changes the topic. That's the reason why he came here. He would watch the recording of their Duels, but he also wants to know what Onizuka and Blood Shepherd think about their opponents as professional Duelists. They may see things that's not shown in the recordings.

Onizuka first shares his Duel against Soulburner, explaining how his Salmangreat monsters have various effects related to battle and GY recursion. Their monsters work best when summoned with another monster of the same name. Soulburner is also capable of Ritual Summon, not just Link Summon. Then, Blood Shepherd also shares his Duel against Playmaker, how the hero of LINK VRAINS has mastered not only Link Summon and Ritual Summon, but also Fusion Summon, emphasizing how Playmaker has grown stronger than before.

"I see. They're surely not easy prey to hunt. Holysaber's DIVINE-Attribute Deck was also powerful. And that's still the least of my worries." Shion admits, now it's his turn to share his finding.

"The least of your worries? What do you mean?" Akira asks. What could be more worrying than the DIVINE-Attribute Deck that Knight himself admitted to being powerful?

"Holysaber is capable of controlling the Data Storm and use a Skill similar to Playmaker's Storm Access." Shion reveals, eliciting low gasps from the other occupants of the room.

"Controlling Data Storm?! Are you serious, Knight?!" Akira can't believe what he just heard. To control a Data Storm, the Data Material, one must solve the Ignis algorithm. Nobody in SOL Technologies can achieve such a feat, but Holysaber could?

"Yes. You can watch the recording of my Duel if you don't believe me that much." Shion replies, silently amused by the reaction he got. He then turns to Blood Shepherd again, "He didn't use that Skill against you. Looks like you're not a threat enough for him."

"What was that?" Blood Shepherd glares at Shion, offended. But he quickly shut his mouth and says no more. Judging from the Chief of Security's attitude, he was trying to rile him up for amusement's sake. Getting angry at him would only get him nowhere. He'll make him eat his words once he gets the job done.

"I'll have my assistant to give you copies of the recording. We can watch and learn from these Duels. Perhaps next time, we'll do a better job against our targets." Shion informs them.

Though Shion is polite, and it sounds like he's trying to help them, the underlying implication is clear to Akira, Onizuka, and Blood Shepherd. He said, 'do a better job', not 'win'. Knight doesn't expect them to ever win against Playmaker and his friends.

" *Knight… why is he provoking Onizuka and Blood Shepherd like this? What is he planning?"* Akira wonders. Onizuka already has deep insecurity towards Playmaker. Then, he lost to Soulburner, and now Knight is igniting his sense of inferiority. Blood Shepherd has better control of his emotions, but Blood Shepherd won't let that remark slide. Is this Knight's way of motivating them? No, Akira quickly doubts that's the case.

"Has there been a call from Queen? I had expected she'll roast us for our failure." Shion asks Akira. He is surprised that they haven't heard anything from their boss.

"I haven't made the report to her. I'm planning to do so after this meeting." Akira answers.

"Then I'll be the one to deliver the bad news." Shion turns his back on them, walking towards the door, "Zaizen, just focus on that unidentified gate you've found. Holysaber and the others must've gone through that gate by now. I'll report everything to Queen myself."

Shion doesn't wait for an answer and walks out. He got the intel that he wanted. He successfully provoked Onizuka and Blood Shepherd. People with huge egos tend to become impatient. When people are impatient, they make hasty decisions with little or no thought process behind them, may become easily frustrated when things move slower than they would like, leading to decreased productivity and missed opportunities. Onizuka has already begun to sink, and though Blood Shepherd didn't show it, that A.I.-hating bounty hunter will double his efforts in finding the Ignis.

"I won't make things easy for them…"

Knight smirks as he makes his way back to his office.

Unknown Server - LINK VRAINS

"Not good!" Ai says as his arms start to strain. So was Flame and Holysaber. They can't keep blocking the wind any longer.

"I'm at my limits too!" Flame can barely hold his arms up.

A gust of wind and dirt hit them as all the three shields disintegrated, no longer blocking the wind. The three Duelists tumble, closing their eyes as they prepare for an impact. However, the impact never came. All of a sudden, the wind just disappeared completely, clearing their path.

"Eh?" Ai looks at their surroundings, not feeling any pressure or even the slightest bit of breeze, "The wind…"

"It stopped blocking us?" Playmaker is as confused as his Ignis partner.

"This is our chance. Let's go quickly. We don't know what'll happen if we remain here too long." Holysaber suggests. The wind might have disappeared now, but he won't dismiss the possibility it'll appear again.

They continue flying through the canyon. The path is clear. They don't sense even a bit of wind as they fly. They keep flying until they see a distant cliffside. Floating near it is a massive stone building surrounded by trees. Landing on the base of the building, they see the building closer in front of the damaged staircase and a few pillars. It is a temple with a design that bears resemblance to Etruscan architecture.

Now here, all five of them feel uncomfortable. The place is too quiet. There's not a single thing that shows any sign of life. They're online, so everything is made up of data, not exactly alive, but even other places that they knew online still have something that gave a lively atmosphere. This? It's like they're standing inside a ghost town.

They walk upstairs, hoping to find something. At the end of the stairs is a forest. And that is when Holysaber and Playmaker's instinct

kicks in.

"Someone's here!" Playmaker alerts his friends.

Holysaber's eyes shift to the trees in front of them, prompting Playmaker and the others to do the same.

As if on cue, the branches of the trees in front of them rustles, something black and large appears from the trees, revealing itself. It's a being - a monster with a single red eye and a ribcage on the outside of its abdomen, and a pair of yellow claws. The monster roars at them, eliciting a scream from Ai while the rest quickly make a defensive posture.

Flame, however, tenses up at the sight of the monster.

"This monster is…"

Because he recognizes that monster all too well. He won't forget it. He can't even if he wants to. He had seen that monster before, when his home world, the Cyberse World, was destroyed to the ground. He remembers very clearly how this monster blasted down the Ignis' tower and crushed their lands.

"The monster that destroyed Cyberse World!" Flame reveals.

"What?" Playmaker exclaims without turning his attention away from the monster.

"This guy?" Ai looks at the monster even more cautiously.

The monster's mouth widens, gathering energy. The action makes everyone even more tense up, clenching their fists as they prepare for what is going to come at them…

"Gyahahahahaha!"

… until they heard loud laughter coming from the monster's mouth.

The energy in the mouth disappears. Instead, a small light green figure floated in front of the monster's mouth.

"I tricked you!" The green figure gloats while making a dancing motion, "I'm so happy!"

"You were okay?!" Ai instantly recognizes the dancing green figure.

"Yeah." The green figure stops dancing to properly face them.

Holysaber blinks as he looks carefully at the small green figure. That light green body and wind-like markings are familiar. He had seen it somewhere. He narrows his eyes, trying to recall the sense of familiarity. Then it hit him. Yes. He had seen this little guy in one of his visions, or to be precise in Divine Ignis' memories. And it just happened to be something he had seen only a while ago during his Duel against Knight.

"Ai, is that your friend?" Playmaker asks his partner, still cautious.

"He is the Wind Ignis." Holysaber identifies the green creature in Ai's stead. Though he said so, there's an unnerving uncertainty in his chest when he looks at the Wind Ignis.

"Yes, I'm the Wind Ignis." The said Ignis confirms before looking behind him and says, "Echo, you can come back."

The monster glows green and gradually turns into a humanoid in light blue and dark blue robes. The Wind Ignis lands on its left wrist.

"Well? Was my Ignis joke funny?" Wind Ignis asks without the slightest bit of guilt in his prank.

"You went too far! Flame was so scared that he farted!" Ai protests.

"No, that was you." Flame counters in annoyance at the Dark Ignis taking any chance to make fun of him.

"Fart? Just because of this? You've hung out with humans for so long that your senses are out of whack." Wind Ignis says with a tone close to condescending.

"Shouldn't you be looking for your Lost Incident partner?" Flame asks, changing the subject.

"I can't trust humans like you do. I don't want to be captured." Wind Ignis replies.

His answer sounds unpleasant for Soulburner and Holysaber, but they're not making any excuses considering that there are humans who are targeting the Ignis. They can't blame Windy for being distrustful of humans. They were lucky to have Ai and Flame who are more open-minded.

"You're no fun." Flame grunts. Though he understands why, he wishes Wind Ignis would at least give more consideration to connect with his partner like he and Ai do than outright denying it.

"Then how about Divine Ignis? I don't see him with the guy who is supposed to be his partner here." Wind Ignis points at Holysaber, whose Duel Disk has nothing but his Deck, "He's always interested in humans, but after what happened five years ago, it won't be strange his interest fades and he doesn't want to have anything to do with humans anymore."

Holysaber can't say anything to that. Even though he shares memories with Divine Ignis, he knows little about him and mostly knows about him from second-hand account courtesy of Ai and Flame. It's possible that the reason why Divine Ignis hasn't made an appearance is because he had lost faith in humans, including Holysaber, his own Origin.

"You don't know that! Divine Ignis must have an important reason why he won't show up!" Ai says in his best friend's defense.

"Enough. Wind Ignis, did you create this world?" Playmaker asks before Windy could say more.

"Wind Ignis, huh…" The green figure crosses his arms in thought at the way Playmaker is referring him. "That name is a bit lacking. But the Ignis' real names are too hard for humans. But I don't want a weird name… So call me Windy!"

"Windy?" Ai looks at the Wind Ignis doubtfully at his choice of name. It's unexpected he'd pick a simple and cute-sounding name to call himself. But if the guy himself wants it, then Ai has no reason to convince him otherwise. It's none of his business anyway.

"This is Echo," Windy said, pointing at the humanoid whose wrist he is standing on. "A program I created."

"I'm Echo. A program created by Master Windy." Echo introduces himself.

"Windy, what are you doing here?" Playmaker asks. He can understand why Windy avoids looking for his Origin, but that doesn't explain why he created this world and stayed here the whole time. From the looks of it, he already knew the three of them, then he should've known that Ai and Flame are with them. Why didn't he just reach out to them?

"So, you're Playmaker. The hero who saved LINK VRAINS." Windy evaluates Playmaker before turning to look at the other two Duelists who are with him, "And you two are Soulburner and Holysaber."

Under Windy's evaluating gaze, Holysaber finds himself uncomfortable inside. Now meeting the Wind Ignis directly, Holysaber feels there's something odd about Windy. The Wind Ignis he saw in his vision gave off a different vibe from the one in front of him. He had only seen Windy in Divine Ignis' memory once, so there are a lot of things he still doesn't know about the Wind Ignis. Judging by how Flame and Ai reacted, Wind Ignis' behavior is not out of ordinary, this is how Wind Ignis usually is.

But strangely, for some reason, there's something… wrong.

Holysaber can't put it into words, but something is not right about this Windy in front of them.

"Well! No point standing around talking here. Follow me." Windy beckons them to follow into the temple.

The three Ignis and three humans cross a small bridge over a stream leading them to a stone gazebo decorated with red roses at the center of the garden.

"Windy, I'm glad you're okay, but answer that question. We're in a hurry." Flame demands. They don't know when Bohman will make his move. They must go and confront him first before he disappears again.

"About why I created this world? And what I'm doing here? For the first question, I was waiting for my friends to show up." Windy refers to Ai and Flame, causing Ai to perk up.

"You were waiting for us?" Ai asks to make sure he heard it right.

"Yeah. If I connected a world of wind to LINK VRAINS, I thought you'd eventually sniff it out and come here." Windy confirms. Flame makes a sound of understanding, and Windy then continues to reveal his intention, "Sure enough, you came. If we're all together, we can rebuild Cyberse World."

"Rebuild Cyberse World…" Ai muses. After being far away from home for five years, Ai wants nothing more than to return and once again live his peaceful days with his friends. To have returned only to see his home was destroyed broke his heart. He wants to restore the home that he knew, or even make it better than before. Not just Windy, Ai is sure that the rest of his Ignis friends shares the same wish.

"Not a bad idea." Flame says in approval, confirming Ai's unspoken wish.

"Secondly, I wanted to lure the enemy here. If you can sniff this place out, the one who destroyed Cyberse World will too." Windy reveals his second objective.

"What'll you do after luring the enemy?" Ai asks. He never expected Windy to create this world with that kind of intention in mind.

"Fight 'em, of course. They must atone for destroying Cyberse World. Even I - who's always calm and collected - feels resentment." Windy says, surprising the other two Ignis.

"I didn't know you had such passion." Flame never takes Windy as the type who'll be willing to exact revenge like this. Sure, it's normal to get angry, but Windy usually prioritize on safety until the right time comes. For him to go through such lengths to lure the enemy feels almost out of character.

"I do. It's just harder to tell than you." Windy says defensively.

"But you'll fight? You've never been that strong." Ai looks at Windy skeptically.

Ai knows he had been separated from his friends for five years, but looking at Windy, Ai don't think that Windy's Dueling skill has improved greatly. As far as he remembers, even though Windy is the best at controlling Data Material than any of them, Windy is a bit like him. Though not lazy, Windy is more carefree than the other Ignis, second only to him. He also liked to play a lot of pranks on the other Ignis. As long as he has Data Material, he doesn't care much for anything else.

"That's why I created this world. Strong winds created from Data Material make this place a trap. I control Data Material better than anyone. But it did take time to gather the Data Material scattered throughout the network." Windy continues with his explanation.

"That's why this world only appeared now." Playmaker doesn't know the process of creating this world, but knowing how scarce Data Material is, he can partially imagine the efforts that it took to complete this world.

This should make their talk easier. Since part of Windy's intention creating this world was to lure out the enemy who destroyed the Cyberse World, then they are sharing the common goal.

"Windy, we're after someone. His name is Bohman. He stole my acquaintance's brother's consciousness data. If we don't retrieve it, he'll be asleep forever." Playmaker tells the Wind Ignis. Since Bohman disappeared at the location where Windy's gate is, it's certain that he has entered this world.

"He had the same card as the one who destroyed Cyberse World." Flame reveals.

"Oh? That's very interesting, but I don't know anyone named Bohman." Windy denies.

"Seriously? He fled into this world. You didn't notice?" Ai asks again. Windy created this world, so how could someone enter this world without him noticing.

"Lots of people come here, but most of them self-destruct to the trap. My security's perfect. I can't watch every little thing." Windy argues at the accusation.

"Then, do you know any Duelist who wears Melpomene mask? When I met Ai in the Cyberse World, this Duelist attacked us." Holysaber asks.

"Hmm… Nope. I never saw or heard of anyone like that before." Windy also denies. He then then cocks his head like he just remembers something. "Wait a sec. I once sensed a strange presence at the edge of this world."

"That's it!" Ai points out.

"Is there a chance that someone created a new world by going through this world?" Flame asks. Bohman has shown that he is capable of digitizing and stealing a human's consciousness directly from their body. And then there's that Link Magic he's using. His avatar is also high quality. That requires exceptional programming skills. It's safe to assume that creating a new world is not out of Bohman's abilities.

"And use my trap as a cover? That's smart." Windy contemplates that possibility.

"Will you help us?" Playmaker asks.

"Please, Windy. For my sake." Ai begs.

Windy narrows his eyes, seemingly in deep contemplation. Emphasize "seemingly", because only several seconds afterwards, he quickly gives his reply.

"I refuse." Windy answers. That's not the answer Ai expected to hear.

"You said your target came here. And that they created a new world. But those are only assumptions. If you want my help, you need to bring evidence." Windy says with a relaxed tone despite the upmost urgency in Ai and Flame's gestures. He ignores their reactions like it's nothing important, "But forget that and live here instead. Instead of helping humans, we can rebuild Cyberse World quicker if the Ignis come together."

"Well…" Ai can't deny that Windy's idea doesn't sounds bad to him. And part of him is tempted to accept the offer.

"It's true that the Ignis wish to rebuild the Cyberse World," Flame admits. He loves his home world and wants to rebuild it again, so they can live there preacefully like in the old days.

Playmaker, Soulburner, and Holysaber can't say anything to it. They understand how much their Ignis friends miss their home world. Each of them has their own reason to fight, and the culprits behind their reasons happened to be related with each other. That's why they decided to fight together. When Flame asked for Playmaker's assistance, if it weren't for Bohman possessing the same Link Magic as the one who destroyed Cyberse World, Playmaker would've prioritized finding and rescuing Jin over investigating the Cyberse World's destruction. The three humans can't force their Ignis friends to stay with them if they decide to prioritize rebuilding their home world. Besides, with SOL Technologies hunting them down, perhaps it's safer for them to stick together and hide away.

Fortunately for them, their worries were unfounded.

"But I'll pursue the culprit, I want to know the truth about Cyberse World's destruction." Flame refuses to let the culprit get away. He needs to know why they attacked them and destroyed the Cyberse World. The destruction of their world and Bohman's attack also opens the possibility that their enemies may try to attack them again and destroy the Ignis for good. It's pointless to rebuild the Cyberse World if they're going to be attacked again.

Soulburner smiles in relief, glad knowing that his partner will stick with him.

"I feel the same for now." Ai also agrees with Flame. He can't forgive the one who destroyed the Cyberse World. Knowing the culprit is still out there unnerves him. He can't live peacefully while wondering when the culprit will attack again.

"So I'm being premature…" Windy growls, not exactly pleased by Ai and Flame's reply.

"That's right. We'll uncover the whole truth and then rebuild Cyberse World." Flame affirms his and Ai's decision on the matter.

"I see. I'm just happy to know you guys are okay, so I'll help a little. I'll weaken the Data Storm leading to that strange area." Windy agrees to give his assistant, much to Ai and the others' relief.

"That's plenty. We'll do the rest on our own." Though Windy won't help them directly in finding Bohman, Flame is still grateful he'll do this much to help them.

"But I have one condition."

"What condition?" Ai asks.

"Do something about them!" Windy snaps his fingers, making a screen appear. The screen shows two women on their D-Boards, flying through the same canyon they passed earlier while protecting themselves with bluish green shield.

"Ghost Girl!" Playmaker recognizes the treasure hunter.

Seeing closer, Ghost Girl now has a slightly different design. She no longer covers her mouth with a mask, her collar has been changed, her mauve stripes are now hot pink, her gloves have been altered and, along with her belt, are now dark purple. Part of her sides are now white, she has shoulder pads, the belt buckle is now in the shape of a gold and dark olive "G" with a similarly colored diamond to where her zipper was.

"Who's the other?" Soulburner looks at the unknown woman next to Ghost Girl.

She has middle length hair reaching past her shoulders with two bangs and she wears a pink heart-shaped clip on the right side of her hair. Her outfit and the way she dresses is similar to Ghost Girl. Her outfit is a one-piece outfit consisting of a white, blue and pink vest with a zipper and shorts, stockings and blue boots. She also wears a belt with a deck box on both sides and dark blue elbow length fingerless gloves.

"They're tougher than I thought. I think they'll make it here. Can you chase them away? If you defeat them in a duel, they'll be ejected from this world." Windy requests.

"Do it yourself." Ai tells the Wind Ignis. This is his world, so it's his responsibility to take care of it from intruders.

"No way! I don't want to reveal myself, and I don't want to risk putting myself in danger." Windy refuses.

"And it's okay to put *us* in danger?" Holysaber retorts. He said he created this world to lure out the enemy and yet he doesn't want to put himself in danger, that's rather contradictory. It doesn't look like he's asking out cowardice, he just finds it a hassle to personally handle them, which makes it all the more irritating.

"Weaken the winds around them. If you do, we'll take care of them." Playmaker agrees.

"Hey!" Ai protests.

"Playmaker, are you sure with this?" Holysaber frowns at how Playmaker readily accepts the request.

"We fought Hanoi together, so I'm on good terms with Ghost Girl. We can talk and work it out." Playmaker reasons. He doesn't know who the other woman is, but Ghost Girl won't cause altercation without a justify reason. She's a treasure hunter who mainly works for profit, but she's not joining the bounty hunters employed by SOL Technologies. It's safe to assume that she most likely feels indebted to him. That' will open a chance for discussion.

Holysaber is not sure, but since Playmaker said so, he'll go along with it. He knows Ghost Girl when using his Tsurugi avatar, but he doesn't want to reveal that identity to her. At least not when he still doesn't know where she stands. He must keep that possibility in mind. In case Ghost Girl turns out to be against them, he can use his

alternate identity as Tsurugi the cyber sleuth to get information out of her later.

"Negotiations complete." Windy concludes. When they're about to depart, Windy turns to the Olympios Stratos user, "Hey, Holysaber."

"Yes?" Holysaber faces the Wind Ignis again.

"I saw you used the Data Storm to block the wind. You can use our algorithm?" Windy asks, his tone sounds more serious than before.

"Only to a certain extent. I'm still studying Ignis algorithm, but I think I'll get the hang of it soon." Holysaber answers truthfully. Again, the uncomfortable feeling that he felt from Windy a while ago returns. No, it's even worse than before. He doesn't like it. It's like being drenched in cold frozen water.

"… Is that so…" Windy sighs softly before turning away from Holysaber, leaving it at that, "For now, you lot deal with those two intruders, and I'll ease the Data Storm so you can find this Bohman."

"Thank you, Windy." Playmaker thanks the Wind Ignis before turning to his friends.

The three of them nod at each other and then jump to their D-Boards, flying back to the canyon.

Canyon - Windy's World - LINK VRAINS

Holysaber can't brush off the feeling he has towards Windy. When he saw Windy in his vision, he felt warmth, the same warmth when he saw Ai together with Divine Ignis in his dreams. The warmth that is like flowers blooming in spring, like how he feels when he's spending time with his friends and family. The Windy that he just met, however, perturbs him. Perhaps it's strange coming from him who knows little about Ignis, but the Windy in his vision and the Windy he just met are like two different people.

"Are you okay, Holysaber? You look like you're lost in thought." Playmaker asks, looking back at Holysaber with concern.

"Sorry. I'm just thinking about Windy." Holysaber replies.

"What about him?" Ai looks back as well at the mention of his Wind Ignis friend.

"I'm just wondering, is he always like that?" Holysaber asks Ai and Flame.

"Yeah. Pretty much. He's still the same prankster that I know. Him and his joke are never funny." Flame sighs with a tinge of annoyance as he recalls the old times when Windy often pulled pranks on them. The worst part was that out of all the Ignis, he was the one whom the Wind Ignis targeted most because he found his lecture particularly hilarious.

"I liked to pull some pranks, but even I never went as far as he did. It's a pain in the ass." Ai adds, equally annoyed like Flame while recalling his time with Windy years ago. He was a bit envious of Light Ignis and Water Ignis who were exempt from falling victims to Windy's prank because their leader was too fast for him to prank on, and their sub-leader could always see through lies.

"But you guys seem to trust him." Holysaber can see that even though they were annoyed, neither Flame nor Ai doubted Windy. They took his words without hesitation.

"He has a terrible hobby, but he does his job diligently in maintaining the Cyberse World. Unlike Ai here." Flame jabs at the Dark Ignis, which Ai responds with a pout but can't deny.

"Is that so…" Holysaber says nothing more. He can't tell them that he's suspicious of the Wind Ignis. He has nothing to support this suspicion except for his intuition. Ai and Flame have been with Windy since the beginning, they know him better than Holysaber does who only learned recently. Perhaps he's overthinking things.

Even though he can't trust Windy, he ought to trust Ai and Flame. And so, he decided to put this concern behind him.

"There they are!" Soulburner points to the two people ahead of them.

The trio intercepted Ghost Girl and her partner, repositioning themselves so that Playmaker and Holysaber are on the right with the latter behind the former, while Soulburner is on their left.

"Long time no see, Playmaker." The girl with blue hair greets the hacker.

"Long time no see?" Playmaker repeated confusedly.

"I owe you for the Tower of Hanoi, but I'll pay you back someday." The girl says as she removes the shield protecting her from the wind that has now disappeared.

"Could it be… you're Blue Angel?" Playmaker deduces.

"Yes. Call me Blue Girl when I'm using this avatar." Blue Girl confirms.

"Really? You seem pretty different." Soulburner comments excitedly at Blue Angel's new avatar design, "But your new avatar is cool! Maybe I'll change my avatar too."

"What's the point? No one knows you." Flame immediately crushes Soulburner's excitement.

"So you're Soulburner, and you're Holysaber." Ghost Girl addressed the Duelists accompanying Playmaker, disintegrating her shield as well. The mention of their names perks up the said two Duelists.

"Seems we're unexpectedly famous." Soulburner glances down at his Ignis partner who just a moment ago said that no one knows him, which Flame totally ignores.

"I'm the Fire Ignis, Flame." Flame introduces himself.

"So you're also a victim of the Lost Incident?" Ghost Girl directs the question to Soulburner. Since Playmaker is a victim of the Lost Incident and Ai is his Ignis partner, she could only think that the same also goes for Soulburner.

"Yes." Soulburner confirms.

"I don't have Divine Ignis with me, but I'm also a victim of the Lost Incident." Holysaber reveals, not seeing a reason to hide it from the two women since they already knew about the incident.

"Divine Ignis?" Blue Girl repeats the name questioningly.

"You must have heard that the Lost Incident kidnapped seven children, right? Each of those children became the basis of creating the Ignis and each represents Duel Monster Attributes. In my case, just like my Deck, the Ignis based on me is of DIVINE-Attribute." Holysaber explains.

"After seeing your DIVINE-Attribute Deck, we don't have a choice but to trust your story." Ghost Girl doesn't ask him further in that topic, and instead ask a different question that everyone, or to be precise Akira, wishes to know, "The Knights of Hanoi - who caused the Lost Incident - are gone. So why are you three people and two Ignis teaming up?"

"We only want to retrieve stolen consciousness data." Playmaker answered.

"Consciousness data…" Ghost Girl remembers the man with Link Magic that Dueled Playmaker before. That man must be the one who stole this consciousness data.

"Why are you here?" This time, it's Playmaker's turn to ask.

"You're gonna use us again, aren't you?" Ai frowns, specifically to Ghost Girl due to their history.

"Yeah. No point hiding it, so I'll tell you. We came to find the Ignis." Ghost Girl admits honestly.

"For SOL Technologies?" Playmaker assumes, which Ghost Girl confirms again.

"So SOL Technologies didn't only hire rough-looking hunters." Soulburner comments. The bounty hunters pursuing them before were all men who are all too eager to hunt them down that conversation is close to not possible with them.

Ghost Girl smiles at that comment. "Didn't expect to see such beauties?"

"Never said you were beauties." Flame denies.

"Seems I'm not attractive for Ignis." Ghost Girl remarks with dejected smile.

"I'm sure SOL- I mean, my brother can help you." Blue Girl says in attempt to convince them to their side.

"You don't understand," Soulburner says, confusing Blue Girl. "The Lost Incident made us suffer for a long time. SOL Technologies was also responsible for that. Entrusting our future to them?"

"Not a chance." Ai dismisses the idea.

"Blue Girl, I know enough that your brother only has good intentions for us, and I appreciate that, however, even your brother can't go against the company, especially when a SOL Technologies already sent one of their higher-ups to hunt us down." Holysaber had only ever seen Akira Zaizen from afar when he's speaking to Kazue's father, but he could tell from those exchanges that Akira is a kind-hearted man.

"Thanks for willing to help, but we'll solve our own problems." Playmaker calmly rejects the offer. It's not that they don't trust

Zaizen. Playmaker knows that he can trust Zaizen won't harm them. The one they can't trust is the company he's working for. Zaizen's position is not high enough to guarantee their safety.

"In that case, those Ignis were originally under SOL Technologies' control," Blue Girl said aggressively. Her friendly tone changes to annoyance. "How about you give them back?"

Holysaber stiffens when he processed what Blue Girl just said.

"… What…?" Holysaber utters in disbelief.

Did he just hear it right? Did she just say what he thinks it is? She's got to be joking to say that straight to their faces.

"Huh? That's crazy!" Soulburner objects to Blue Girl's conclusion.

"Blue Girl!" Ghost Girl calls in admonishing tone. They should be trying to convince them to let Akira meet the Ignis, not taking them by force. Since they arrived here, her partner has been too impatient. If they could've just listened to them a bit more, understanding more of their situation, maybe they can reach a compromise.

Too bad for Ghost Girl, Blue Girl is too stubborn to even try listening to her, already believing she's in the right. Any attempt to convince her is pointless. Words enter one ear only to get out from another.

"If we get their Ignis, we may learn the other Ignis' location. If you won't accept our help…" Blue Girl's tone turns threatening.

"You'll settle this in a duel?" Soulburner finishes what he assumed to be her answer.

"That's right!" Blue Girl confirms.

"You… you're seriously saying that…?" Holysaber asks, hoping that he has misheard her or that she realized the meaning of her own words and quickly take it back. To his disappointment, Blue Girl

raises her Duel Disk, ready to Duel. She truly means it. Does she not realized how insensitive her words were?

"Of course I am! I won't let you get away!" Blue Girl declares. She is so fired up that she doesn't notice the change air around Holysaber.

Holysaber feels something boiling. His fists clench and teeth lock up. The inside of his stomach feels hot. Like, there's a build up steam, threatening to burn him, to burn the person on the receiving end. Along with this steam, a scream from deep within him is trying to force its way from his mouth, it is as if his terrified soul is unleashing a demon.

His mind sees a scared child within, the boy who was forced to fight and starved for food. He sees the pain beneath it and his soul drowning in never-ending nightmares. The boy trapped in darkness as he craves the sunlight. His pitiful child-self whose eyes slowly lost his light as days passed until they reflected nothing, becoming heartless eyes of solitude as despair swallowed him whole.

"You knew yet you push that fact to the side like it's nothing…" Holysaber murmurs. He narrows his eyes, looking sharply at Blue Girl, "Bring it on. We'll settle this with a Tag Duel. Me and Soulburner against you and Blue Girl."

"There you go, Playmaker! It's not often that I get to Duel Blue Girl, LINK VRAINS' savior." Soulburner is more than motivated to accept the challenge. He already Dueled Onizuka, and now he gets to Duel Blue Girl. In a way, this is a lucky day for him.

"Playmaker, Ai, you go on ahead. We can't let this chance slip from our fingers. You don't need to waste your time with them. Soulburner and I will kick them out of this place." Holysaber urges Playmaker to go first. While they're arguing with the two women, Bohman may get away. At least one of them must go.

"Soulburner, Holysaber, I leave this to you guys!" Playmaker entrusts the Tag Duel to them, accelerating his D-Board to fly to their

designated destination.

"Wait, Playmaker!"

Ghost Girl attempts to stop Playmaker from leaving, wishing to try one more time to convince him through words. Her path is blocked by a Data Storm suddenly appearing in front of her, pushing her away from Playmaker. She tries to give a chance once she regains her balance, but then another Data Storm stops her from moving towards the direction where Playmaker is going. In his stead, Holysaber is flying on his D-Board in front of her. He snaps his fingers, dismissing the Data Storm instantly.

"If you want to go to him, you'll have to go through us." Holysaber tells her.

Blue Girl immediately flies to Ghost Girl's side, glaring at Holysaber and Soulburner.

"Fine by me. We won't lose." Blue Girl accepts the challenge.

Ghost Girl sighs. So much for a discussion. Now that it comes to this, there's nothing she can do to stop them.

Blue Girl had decided since the moment she woke up after the battle at Tower of Hanoi that she'll become stronger for everyone who supported her. For her brother, who believes in her, entrusted her with this mission. She had enough with having other people rescue her. This time, she'll be the one to protect them.

"I'll win this Duel with my improved Deck!" Blue Girl declares. It's an affirmation to herself, to her will to see this through. She'll win this Duel and acquire that Ignis. And it'll lead her to the other Ignis. After losing to Specter, she analyzed her skills and strengthened her Deck. Her Trickstar Deck is not the same as before. She knows that she can win with the improvement she has made.

"By the way, do you have any strategy? Her Deck uses a variety of combos to shave your LP." Flame asks Soulburner and Holysaber. Blue Angel is a famous Idol Duelist, so knowing how her Deck works is like common knowledge for him.

"Yeah. We can't win unless we stop that." Soulburner already studied Trickstar Deck from watching Blue Angel's Duels available on the internet, so he knows what he must do if he goes against her. "I'll set my formation before she starts her combo."

"And you, Holysaber? Know anything about Ghost Girl's Deck?" Flame didn't bother to look up on Ghost Girl, so he knows almost nothing about the treasure hunter.

"Ghost Girl's Deck has swarming and disruptive capabilities supported by Traps. And like Trickstars, most of her monsters have low ATKs. Making her playing second, Trap removal cards, and high ATK monsters should do the job." Holysaber explains. He has plenty of experience with Ghost Girl that

One common thing shared by both Trickstar and Altergeist Decks to use their fullest is that they must go first. If Holysaber and Soulburner managed to make the first turn, it'll give them an advantage in setting up their field to prevent their opponents from forming their respective combo.

"Holysaber, between the two of us, can I go first?" Soulburner asks for permission.

"I don't mind. Be sure to go first before them though." Holysaber relents. He trusts Soulburner to set their field to counter against the Trickstar and Altergeist.

Soulburner approaches Blue Girl, proposing that the person who flies through the canyon bridge first gets to go first. Blue Girl agrees, and the two Duelists quickly race towards their designated finish line. Blue Girl gets momentarily blocked by a ledge, allowing Soulburner to get the lead. But this doesn't last long as a falling boulder crashes

onto the bridge, causing its pieces to slow down Soulburner who must fly while dodging them, which leads to Blue Girl flying through the finish line first.

"I win. I go first." Blue Girl smiles victoriously.

"Good going." Ghost Girl praises her partner.

"You did what you could. We'll think of something." Holysaber tells the dejected Soulburner. It'll make things difficult for them, but it doesn't mean there's no other way. It might cost them some of their LP, but they'll come up with a counterattack.

Holysaber absolutely refuses to lose in this Duel. He refuses to lose against Blue Girl.

"Speed Duel!"

Holysaber & Soulburner LP: 4000

Blue Girl & Ghost Girl LP: 4000

"I activate Magic Card: Trickstar Vision! I Special Summon a Trickstar monster from my hand!" Blue Girl Special Summons Trickstar Lilybell in Attack Position to the Main Monster Zone.

Trickstar Lilybell (FAIRY/EFFECT/ATK: 400/DEF: 2000)

"When this effects Special Summons a monster, its ATK are halved, and its effects are negated." The A.I. from Blue Girl's Duel Disk explains the following effect.

"And we both draw one card." Blue Girl reveals the last effect. She, Ghost Girl, and her two opponents then draw a card from the top of their Decks.

"Lycoris activated her effect on Lilybell! She Special Summons herself!" Blue Girl returns Lillybell that she just summoned to her

hand and then Special Summon Lycoris in Attack Position in the Main Monster Zone.

Trickstar Lycoris (FAIRY/LIGHT/EFFECT/ATK: 1600/DEF: 1200/LV: 3)

"Lilybell's effect! When she's added to my hand other than by a draw, she Special Summons herself!" Blue Girl summons back Lillybell that she just returned to her hand to the right zone next to Lilybell in Attack Position.

"Shine! The circuit of courage and determination!" Blue Girl summons the Link Summoning portal above her. She set Lillybell and Lycoris in the Link Markers, placing Lillybell on the Bottom-Right Arrow, and Lycoris on the Bottom Arrow.

"Link Summon! Appear, Link 2, Trickstar Divaridis!" Blue Girl summons her Link Monster to the Extra Monster Zone.

Trickstar Divaridis (FAIRY/LIGHT/LINK/ATK: 1800/LM: Bottom-right, Bottom/LNK: 2)

"I activate Divaridis' effect! When she's Special Summoned, you take 200 damage!" Blue Girl reveals. Divaridis emits sparkling yellow lights around her body, which she then sends to Soulburner and Holysaber, inflicting damage to them.

Holysaber & Soulburner LP: 4000 = 3800

"I'm not done! From my hand, I activate Field Spell: Trickstar Live Stage! When this card activates, I can add a Trickstar in my Graveyard to my hand!" Blue Girl returns Lycoris to her hand before pointing at Live Stage again.

"Live Stage's additional effect activates! Once per turn, it Special Summons a Trickstar Token in Defense Position to a zone a Trickstar Link Monster points to." She Special Summons one Trickstar Token to the bottom-right zone Divaridis points to in Defense Position.

Trickstar Token (ATK: 0/DEF: 0)

"I release Trickstar Token to Advance Summon Trickstar Bidhelm!" Blue Girl releases the token, summoning a Trickstar monster with a winged helmet to her field.

Trickstar Birdhelm (FAIRY/LIGHT/EFFECT/ATK: 0/DEF: 1800/LV: 5)

"As Birdhelm was Normal Summoned, I can activate its effect to inflict 200 damage to my opponent and then drawing a card." Blue Girl once again has her monster inflict another 200 damage to Holysaber and Soulburner.

Holysaber & Soulburner LP: 3800 = 3600

"But since I used this effect, I can't Battle this turn." Blue Girl reveals the payment from using the effect.

"You can't Battle on the first turn anyway." Flame retorts at Blue Girl's cheeky smile. She knew she could use Birdhelm's effect without ahving to worry about Battle Phase since she got to go first.

"I Special Summon Lycoris from my hand! I can reveal this card and then target 1 Trickstar monster I control except itself to return that monster and then Special Summon Lycoris!" Blue Girl returns Birdhelm to her hand and then summons Lycoris.

"You return your Advance Summoned monster to your hand?" Soulburner senses something fishy from her move.

"I activate Birdhelm's effect! This monster can equip herself onto a Trickstar Link Monster I control!" Blue Girl equips Birdhelm to Divaridis. Birdhelm removes her helmet, throwing it at Divaridis who then wears it instead.

"I end my turn." Blue Girl finishes her turn.

"My turn! Draw!" Soulburner draws a card. Immediately after that moment, Blue Girl interrupts him.

"By adding a card to your hand, Lycoris' effect activates! You take 200 damage!" Blue Girl activates Lycoris' effect. Lycoris swings her sword, sending the same spakling tiny lights towards Soulburner and Holysaber, inflicting damage to them.

Holysaber & Soulburner LP: 3600 = 3400

"It's bad that she was able to go first." Soulburner laments his failure for preventing Blue Girl from going first.

"Due to Lycoris, you can't use Burning Draw." Flame remarks.

"Your Skill - Burning Draw - is powerful. By lowering your LP to 100, you can draw one card for every 1000 LP you lost." Blue Girl learned from watching Soulburner's Duel. In case she must Duel against him, she prepared Lycoris to prevent him from using his Skill.

"But the instant I activate my Skill, I lose." Soulburner speaks the fact. It's quite frustrating that his trump card has been sealed.

"Not just yours. The same would happen if I use my Skill." Holysaber breaks the bad news. He can't explain what his Skill is right now since it's not the time and place, only the cost of activating it.

"Seriously?!" Soulburner feels dismayed. He had hoped this Duel might give him the opportunity to see what kind of Skill Holysaber has.

Blue Girl is glad that she took the time to properly rearrange her Deck in preparation for this Duel. Her combo also prevents Holysaber from using his Skill is a pleasant surprise. And Lycoris isn't the only one that can stop Soulburner's Deck. She has another monster behind her sleeve in case they manage to stop Lycoris.

"I activate Salamangreat Meer in my hand! By sending a Salamangreat monster from my hand to the Graveyard, it Special Summon itself!" Soulburner sends Salamangreat Falco to the Graveyard, summoning Meer to his Main Monster Zone in Attack Position.

Salamangreat Meer (CYBERSE/FIRE/EFFECT/ATK: 800/DEF: 600/LV: 2)

"Divaridis' effect! When my opponent Normal or Special Summoned a monster, I can inflict 200 damage to my opponent!" Blue Girl activates Divaridis' effect.

Holysaber & Soulburner LP: 3400 = 3200

"Each hit isn't much damage, but it'll add up." Soulburner looks at Divaridis and Lycoris with calculating gaze. He was the one who asked Holysaber to let him go first. Since he failed to stop Blue Girl from taking the first turn, he'll make it up by turning the tide to their favor. He must summon a monster that can destroy Divaridis while they still have LP.

"I activate Falco's effect in my Graveyard! By returning a Salamangreat monster I control to my hand, it Special Summon itself!" Soulburner returns Meer to his hand and then Special Summon Falco to the Main Monster Zone in Attack Position.

Salamangreat Falco (CYBERSE/FIRE/EFFECT/ATK: 1200/DEF: 1600/LV: 4)

This causes the effects of both Divaridis and Lycoris to activate, inflicting 400 damage in total to Soulburner and Holysaber.

Holysaber & Soulburner LP: 3200 = 2800

"When Meer was added to my hand other than Draw Phase, it Special Summon itself!" Soulburner summons back Meer to his field, which consequently causing Divaridis effect to activates again.

Holysaber & Soulburner LP: 2800 = 2600

"From my hand, I summon Salamangreat Wolvie!" Soulburner summons Wolvie to the Main Monster Zone in Attack Position.

Salamangreat Wolvie (CYBERSE/FIRE/EFFECT/ATK: 1700/DEF: 1000/LV: 4)

Divaridis activates her effect again, inflicting another 200 damage to Soulburner and Holysaber.

Holysaber & Soulburner LP: 2600 = 2400

Despite the damage they received, Soulburner knows that they can't launch a counterattack if they don't summon a powerful monster, so enduring this continuous damage is a necessary payment. Blue Girl also realizes that he summoned three monsters knowing he'd take damage can only mean one thing.

"Go, Soulburner!" Flame cheers for his partner.

"Appear! The circuit that changes the future!" Soulburner summons the Link Summoning portal.

"Arrowheads confirmed! The summoning condition is at least two FIRE Effect Monsters! I set Meer, Falco, and Wolvie to the Link Markers! Circuit combined!" Soulburner set the three Salamangreat monsters.

"Link Summon! Appear, Link 3, Salamangreat Heatleo!" Soulburner summons his ace monster to the Extra Monster Zone in Attack Position.

Salamangreat Heatleo (CYBERSE/FIRE/LINK/ATK: 2300/LM: Bottom-left, Top, Bottom-right/LNK: 3)

"It's here!" As she expected, Soulburner did summon his ace monster. All according to her calculation, "But Divaridis effect deals you damage!"

Divaridis activates her effect and inflicts 200 damage to them again.

Holysaber & Soulburner LP: 2400 = 2200

"But due to Heatleo's effect-" Soulburner is about to use his monster's effect that when Link Summoned, he can target 1 card in his opponent's Spell & Trap Zone and then shuffle it into the Deck, but Blue Girl cut him off.

"Too bad! I won't let you use Heatleo's effect to return cards from the Spell & Trap Zone." Blue Girl interrupts as she reveals, "Your effects can't target the equip card Birdhelm and the equipped Divaridis."

"So that's why you equipped it." Flame now understands why she equipped Divaridis with Birdhelm. That only leaves only one alternative left.

"But I'll destroy it!" If he can't return it to the Deck, then Soulburner will destroy it by force.

Soulburner set one card before he points to Divaridis.

"Battle! I attack Trickstar Divaridis with Heatleo!" Soulburner declares his Battle Phase.

Heatleo roars before advancing towards the Trickstar Link Monster, intensifying its flame. Blue Girl watches the Salamangreat Link Monster coming at them, but her demeanor remains calm, which bothers Holysaber.

Blue Girl has reassessed her Deck many times until she finally settled with her current Deck. Her Deck's weakness is that her monsters have low ATK. She kept losing because her opponent broke through before she erased all their LP.

But this time, it'll be different.

"I activate Trickstar Calobane's effect from my hand! By sending her to the Graveyard, the battling Trickstar gains ATK equal to its original

ATK until the end of the turn!" Blue Girl sends Calobane to the Graveyard, raising Divaridis' ATK equal to its original ATK, which is 1800.

Trickstar Divaridis ATK: 1800 = 3600

"What?!" Soulburner didn't expect that Blue Girl would come up with the means to strengthen her monster.

"So this is what she meant by improving her Deck." Holysaber had a bad feeling when Blue Girl looked so confident. Her improvement was better than he imagined. She's not just all talk.

Next to Blue Girl, her partner, Ghost Girl, is as much impressed. Putting aside her behavior, Blue Girl has proved herself that she has indeed become stronger. She knows what Aoi is capable of, only that the old Aoi, Blue Angel, lacked the motivation of her own, needing someone else to give her the push, too attached to her brother. The current Aoi, Blue Girl, is taking her own initiative. If Akira could see her right now, he would be proud of his younger sister.

" *It would be better if she calms down a little though."* Ghost Girl thinks in the back of her mind. Once this Duel is over, she'll have to make sure Blue Girl won't do anything rash.

As Heatleo is getting closer, Divaridis yells to her mic, unleashing destructive soundwave that stops the Salamangreat monster from advancing further. The impact causes a huge explosion engulfing Heatleo and inflicts Holysaber and Soulburner with bigger damage than Divaridis and Lycoris combined.

Holysaber & Soulburner LP: 2200 = 900

Blue Girl smiles as she believes that she has dealt with Heatleo. When the smoke is cleared, however, Heatleo still remains on the field, surprising Blue Girl and Ghost Girl.

"As Wolvie was used as a Link Material for the Link Summon of a Salamangreat Link Monster, that Link Monster cannot be destroyed by battle or card effects this turn." Soulburner explains. He failed to destroy Divaridis, but at least they won't be completely defenseless since he get to keep Heatleo on the field as their defense.

"I end my turn." Soulburner concludes his turn.

With Soulburner's turn coming to an end, Calobane's effect also ends, reverting Divaridis' ATK to normal.

Trickstar Divaridis ATK: 3600 = 1800

"I can see why you're the Charisma Duelist and hero who saved LINK VRAINS!" Soulburner knows they're not in a good situation, but if it's not like this, Duel won't be fun.

"An Idol must always entertain her fans. I can't make them smile if I only do the same thing over and over. Don't you agree?" Blue Girl replies wittily.

"Yeah. You won't disappoint your fans with this." Soulburner expresses what he genuinely feels.

"You're saying that right now?" Flame intrudes Soulburner's exchange with Blue Girl.

"It's the objective truth that we're behind." Soulburner tells in return.

"But you have one huge edge over Blue Girl. You have an excellent A.I. partner. Me." Flame says proudly and confidently.

"Singing your own praises?" Make no mistake, Soulburner is grateful to have Flame as his partner, but sometimes he is taken aback whenever the Fire Ignis boasts about himself.

"If I help you, your dormant abilities may bloom." Flame tells him.

"So what'll you do for me? Can you actually do anything?" Soulburner asks.

"I can be a compassionate observer from up close." Flame replies like it's the obvious thing to do.

"I don't need that!" Soulburner feels like an idiot to expect a serious answer from Flame.

"I think that's not a bad thing. Having someone silently cheering for you by your side feels reassuring." Holysaber knows that Flame is saying these things now to keep Soulburner from feeling down. Soulburner may feel excited now, but part of him must be feeling tense.

"See? He understands." Flame smiles smugly.

"Holysaber, you don't need to play along with him." Soulburner looks at Holysaber sympathetically.

"Flame is sharp. He can observe this Duel and give us input about their Decks after the Duel is over. We're going to win this Duel, right?" Holysaber smiles encouragingly at Soulburner and Flame.

"As he said, and what I said before. I have no intention of leaving you." Flame reaffirms what he has decided.

"Yeah. Of course!" Soulburner smiles back, feeling more fired up now.

Holysaber observes Blue Girl again. She has certainly learned from her previous Duels. She properly reflected on her Deck, identifying her vulnerabilities and how she can cover for her weaknesses, while building her core style of chipping away at her opponent's life.

" *As a Duelist, she has grown… But not as a person."* Holysaber bitterly recalls what Blue Girl said before the start of the Duel.

For someone who claimed they want to offer help, Blue Girl completely disregards the other party's situation and feelings. How ridiculous. Kazue said that Aoi Zaizen is a kind girl and it'll be nice if they can become friends. Their few exchanges at school didn't give much of an impression on him. Meeting her now though… Holysaber will admit that she's not a bad person, but there's an issue with the attitude she's displaying. It's irritating how she acts ignorant regarding the victims of the Lost Incident.

" *Whatever reason she has, she needs to be put in her place."* Holysaber thinks determinedly.

From the corner of her eyes, Ghost Girl has been observing Holysaber who's mostly being quiet so far. This is the first time she meets and speaks to Holysaber directly. Other than watching his Duel against Blood Shepherd, she knows nothing about him. He is as good as Playmaker in erasing his track, so there's no way to learn about his real-life identity. His ability to control the Data Storm is another attestment to his skill as a programmer.

As a Duelist, he is a strong one. No amateur could defeat Blood Shepherd, one of the best bounty hunters in Den City. Based on that Duel, he has preference to use Pendulum Summon. But considering they're in a Tag Speed Duel, he'll likely adjust his strategy with Soulburner and refrain from using Pendulum Summon to avoid filling the Spell & Trap Zone.

" *Then, the biggest concern would be his ace monster, Elpizo Harpe. Elpizo Harpe's effect will increase his own ATK depending on the difference between the player's LP and the monster pointed by Elpizo Harpe's Link Arrow."* Being the very first and only Divine-Attribute Deck in existence to date, Holysaber's Olympios Stratos leaves a big impression on Ghost Girl. No. Not just her, it leaves a big impression on everyone.

Though Holysaber's presence was an unexpected coincidence, Akira requested them to investigate more about Holysaber and his DIVINE-Attribute Deck. This is a perfect opportunity. She initially

wanted to make a request to Tsurugi for his help in the investigation, but he announced that he's going to take a break for an indefinite time, so he won't be accepting any request. It's too bad she couldn't use her most reliable connection, but she doesn't dislike working only with Blue Girl like this. And she is curious on testing the DIVINE-Attribute Deck herself.

" *I'll have you show me more of your cards, Holysaber."* Now that it has come to this, Ghost Girl won't back down.

"My turn! From my hand, I summon Altergeist Marionetter." Ghost Girl summons Marionetter in Attack Position to the Main Monster Zone next to Lycoris.

Altergeist Marionetter (SPELLCASTER/DARK/EFFECT/ATK: 1600/DEF: 1700/LV: 4)

"When Marionetter was Normal Summoned, I can activate its effect to Set an Altergeist Trap Card from my Deck." Ghost Girl takes out a Trap Card directly from her Deck and then Set it.

"Here it comes. Be careful, Soulburner." Holysaber warns his Tag partner.

"I activate Trap Card: Altergeist Cursed Tomb's effect! Since Cursed Tomb was Set by the effect of an Altergeist monster, it can be activated the turn it was Set! With its effect, I can send an Altergeist card from my Deck to my Graveyard and then Set an Altergeist Magic or Trap Card." Ghost Girl sends an Altergeist Card from her Deck to the Graveyard before once again setting a face-down card in the Spell & Trap Zone, replacing Cursed Tomb.

"A Trap that can be set and activated on the same turn?!" Soulburner looks at the activated Trap Card in disbelief.

"That's a troublesome effect." Flame comments.

"Since a Trap Card was activated, I can Special Summon Altergeist Multifaker from my hand!" Ghost Girl places Multifaker to the zone next to Marionetter.

Altergeist Multifaker (SPELLCASTER/DARK/EFFECT/ATK: 1200/DEF: 800/LV: 3)

"Now, open before me! The circuit that connects to the unknown parallel universe!" Ghost Girl joins her hands together and then opens them wide as if pulling marionette strings, summoning the Link Summoning portal.

"I set Marionetter and Multifaker to the Link Markers. Circuits combined!" Ghost Girl sets Marionetter to the bottom Link Marker and Multifaker to the right Link Marker.

"Link Summon! Appear, Link 2, Altergeist Hexstia!" Ghost Girl summons her Link Monster to the zone pointed by Divaridis' bottom Link Arrow in Attack Position.

Altergeist Hexstia (SPELLCASTER/DARK/LINK/ATK: 1500/LM: Bottom, Right/LNK: 2)

"When an Altergeist Link Monster is Link Summoned to my field, I can target other 1 Link Monster on the field and then Special Summon Altergeist Fijialert from my hand to the zone that target points to!" Ghost Girl targets Divaridis before summoning Fijialert to the zone next to Hexstia in Attack Position.

Altergeist Fijialert (SPELLCASTER/DARK/LINK/ATK: 1400/DEF: 1200/LV: 4)

"Also, the targeted Link Monster is treated as an Altergeist monster until the end of this turn." Ghost Girl adds, temporarily changing Divaridis' archetype to Altergeist.

"Why does she need to make Divaridis treated as Altergeist?" Soulburner wonders.

"Isn't her aim to summon Fijialert? Treating Divaridis as Altergeist monster is something that comes with that, but it doesn't actually matter. What matters is that Fijialert is successfully summoned." Flame deduces.

"I doubt so. She's a sneaky treasure hunter." If working with Ghost Girl has taught him anything, every move she made was done with a scheme in mind.

"Appear once more!" Ghost Girl once again summons the Link Summoning portal.

"I set Hexstia and Fijialert to the Link Markers!" This time, she Sets her Altergeist Link Monster and Effect Monster to the Link Markers.

"Link Summon! Appear, Link 3, Altergeist Primebanshee!" Ghost Girl summons her ace monster to the zone where Hexstia used to be.

Altergeist Primebanshee (SPELLCASTER/DARK/LINK/ATK: 2100/LNK: 3/LM: Bottom, Bottom-right, Right)

"I activate Primebanshee's effect! During my Main Phase, I can Release 1 other Altergeist monster I control to Special Summon 1 Altergeist monster from my Deck to the zone this card points to!" Ghost Girl turns to her partner, winking at her while saying, "Blue Girl, I'm borrowing your Divaridis."

"Huh?" Blue Girl didn't even get the chance to say her respond as Ghost Girl just go through with her plan.

With Divaridis being treated as Altergeist monster due to Fijialert's effect, Ghost Girl Releases it and then Special Summon Altergeist Meluseek to the zone next to Primebanshee in Attack Position.

Altergeist Meluseek (SPELLCASTER/WATER/EFFECT/ATK: 500/DEF: 300/LV: 1)

"She removed Divaridis to summon a lower level monster?" Soulburner blinks in confusion at Ghost Girl's decision. With Divaridis out of the picture, that means they can't use her effect to shave their LP anymore.

"I won't be sure about that, Soulburner." Ghost Girl wiggles her index finger, confusing Soulburner.

"Altergeist Meluseek can attack opponent directly." Holysaber reveals. Meluseek is one of monsters that he had seen Ghost Girl used when they worked together.

"Battle! I attack directly with Meluseek!" Ghost Girl declares her Battle Phase.

Meluseek summons blue glowing bubbles that she shoots towards Holysaber and Soulburner. The bubbles explode upon direct contact, inflicting damage to the two Duelists.

Holysaber & Soulburner LP: 900 = 400

"I activate Meluseek's second effect! When this card inflicts Battle Damage to my opponent, I can target one card my opponent controls and send it to the Graveyard!" Ghost Girl obviously chooses the only monster on their field, Salamangreat Heatleo.

Meluseek extends both her hands and forms a magic circle. Energies is gathering at the center of the magic circle, ready to destroy the opposing Link Monster.

Soulburner doesn't make it easy, however.

"Not so fast! I activate Quick-Play Spell: Salamangreat Triangle! I target one Salamangreat Link Monster I control that was Link Summoned using 3 FIRE Monsters as materials; that Link Monster is unaffected by monster effects this turn!" Soulburner activates a card from his hand, summoning triangular flame that forms a barrier blocking Meluseek's spell.

Despite the Trap foiling her plan, Ghost Girl doesn't look perturbed.

"It's not that I never expected this. I already have a backup in case this happens." Ghost Girl opens the screen that shows her Graveyard and presses one of her Trap Cards, "I activate Altergeist Cursed Tomb's additional effect! I banish this card to move my Altergeist Monster to the Extra Monster Zone and then Special Summon one Altergeist monster or monster treated as Altergeist monster that was destroyed this turn."

"A monster treated as Altergeist… That means… !" Holysaber gasps as he realizes which monster that Ghost Girl intends to summon.

"Correct! I summon back Divaridis from the Graveyard!" Ghost Girl moves Primebanshee to the now empty Extra Monster Zone and then revives Divaridis to the Main Monster Zone, placing herself in the zone next to Meluseek. Due to Fijialert's effect, Divaridis is treated as Altergeist monster until the end of turn. Since Ghost Girl's turn is not over yet, Divaridis is still an Altergeist monster, so it's possible for her to be summoned back.

"And since Divaridis is Special Summoned, she inflicts 200 damage to the opponent." Ghost Girl reactivates Divaridis' life-shaving effect.

"I'm not finished either! I activate Continuous Trap: Gate of Fire! Neither player takes effect damage if the amount is less than or equal to 300!" Soulburner opens his other face-down card, forming a fiery gate that blocks Divaridis' hurtful light.

"I didn't know you can use Divaridis' effect like that with your cards." Blue Girl is genuinely surprised that Ghost Girl took her monster's combo into account to form her attack.

"I told you that I'll give her back. Besides, you're my partner. Partners support each other. Isn't that so?" Ghost Girl winks at Blue Girl, who smiles back in gratitude.

Watching the exchange between the two Girls, Holysaber can't help himself to make a comment, "They do make a great duo. They remind me a bit like you and Flame." He glances at Soulburner and his Ignis partner.

"Us? Like them?" Soulburner points to himself and Flame questioningly.

"I beg to differ. We are partners, but I have quite a hard time babysitting him due to his immaturity." Flame shakes his head dismissively.

"Hey, don't treat me like a kid!" Soulburner protests.

"I wouldn't if you stop acting like one." Flame retorts what he believes to be undeniable fact.

Holysaber sighs at how dishonest the Fire duo next to him. They don't realize that they're proving his point. Soulburner and Blue Girl are more immature compared to their partners, Flame and Ghost Girl, respectively. In turn, Flame and Ghost Girl act as their babysit-their chaperone to make sure they're not straying from the right path. Although Ghost Girl is not doing a good job in keeping Blue Girl in check. If she has, they won't be Dueling right now.

"I end my turn." Ghost Girl concludes. It's too bad that her attempt to destroy Heatleo and inflict more damage with Divaridis' effect failed, but she's doesn't dislike this turn of event. Now, she'll get to see Holysaber in action.

"My turn. Draw." Thanks to Soulburner's Gate of Fire, they won't receive any more damage from Blue Girl's combo, so he can safely summon monsters without having to worry about their LP being shaved each time he summons a monster.

Both Ghost Girl and Blue Girl have watched his Duel against Blood Shepherd, so they already knew about his Pendulum Summon and some monsters he's using, especially one of his two aces, Elpizo

Harpe. Using Pendulum Summon in Speed Duel, and Tag Duel at that, will limit the slot of Spell & Trap Zone that they both are sharing. If he Set a Pendulum Scale, the slot would be full since Soulburner already has Gate of Fire activated. He's not going to take the risk of troubling Soulburner with his Pendulum Scale, so he won't perform Pendulum Summon in this Tag Duel.

With their current LP, he can use Elpizo Harpe's effect to destroy their opponent's low ATK monsters and inflict huge damage. But he is sure that Ghost Girl and Blue Girl are expecting him to summon Elpizo Harpe. Blue Girl made preparations to counter against Soulburner's Deck. It's possible that they have done the same against his Deck.

" *Even so, with my current cards in my hand while in this LP, Elpizo Harpe is my only choice."* Holysaber makes his decision. Even though he can't defeat them on this turn, he'll help Soulburner to ensure he'll deliver the finishing blow.

"From my hand, I summon Saint Kuriboh." Holysaber summons Saint Kuriboh in Attack Position.

Saint Kuriboh (CYBERSE/DIVINE/EFFECT/ATK: 300/DEF: 200/LV: 1)

"When a DIVINE-Attribute Monster is Normal or Special Summoned to my field, I can Special Summon Olympios Stratos - Lerefs from my hand." Holysaber summons Lerefs in Attack Position next to Saint Kuriboh.

Olympios Stratos - Lerefs (CYBERSE/DIVINE/EFFECT/ATK: 1000/DEF: 500/LV: 4)

"When I control two or more Olympios Stratos monsters on my field, I can Special Summon Olympios Stratos - Kalogeros from my hand." Holysaber summons Kalogeros, also in Attack Position, next to Lerefs, filling the entire Main Monster Zone.

Olympios Stratos - Kalogeros (CYBERSE/DIVINE/EFFECT/ATK: 1500/DEF: 1000/LV: 5)

"Three Effect Monsters. It's coming, isn't it?" Blue Girl immediately realizes what Holysaber is planning to do next.

"Yeah. It must be that monster." Ghost Girl also thinks the same.

"Appear! The circuit that lights up the future!" Holysaber summons the Link Summoning portal above him.

"Arrowheads confirmed. The summoning condition is 2 Effect Monsters. I set Saint Kuriboh, Lerefs, and Kalogeros on the Link Markers! Circuit combined!" Holysaber Set Saint Kuriboh in the bottom-left Link Marker, Lerefs in the right Link Marker, and Kalogeros in the top Link Marker.

"Sacred sword that embodies hope. Descend from the heavenly sky and guide the tormented souls away from the evil oppressors! Link Summon! Appear, Link 3, Olympios Stratos - Elpizo Harpe!" Holysaber summons his ace monster to the zone points by Heatleo's bottom-left Link Marker.

Olympios Stratos - Elpizo Harpe (CYBERSE/DIVINE/LINK/ATK: 2300/LM: /LNK: 3)

"When a Link Monster is summoned to my field, I can Special Summon Olympios Stratos - Phyrges from my hand or Graveyard!" Holysaber summons a male humanoid monster wearing a soft conical cap with the apex bent over.

Olympios Stratos - Phyrges (CYBERSE/DIVINE/EFFECT/ATK: 1600/DEF: 1200/LV: 3)

"I activate Phyrges' effect! By Releasing this card, I can move a Link Monster in my Extra Monster Zone to a zone points by other Link Monster's Link Arrow!" Holysaber moves Heatleo to the zone points

by Elpizo Harpe's right Link Arrow, fulfilling the condition to activate Elpizo Harpe's effect.

"I won't let you give your monster a significant power up." Ghost Girl says. She has been waiting for this, "Skill activates! Secret Cure! I excavate cards from my Deck until a Monster Card is revealed. That monster is added to the hand, all non-Monster Cards are sent to the GY, and both players gain LP equal to that monster's ATK!"

Ghost Girl begins to draw from her Deck. The card that she draws is Altergeist Malwisp with 1500 ATK, meaning both she and Blue Girl, and Holysaber and Soulburner gains 1500 LP.

Holysaber & Soulburner LP: 400 = 1900

Blue Girl & Ghost Girl LP: 4000 = 5500

It slipped Holysaber's mind about Ghost Girl's Skill. That said, as he suspected, they have a countermeasure to deal with Elpizo Harpe's effect. Thanks to that, the amount of ATK that Elpizo Harpe received has lessened. That still won't stop him. She may have lessened the amount of ATK that Elpizo Harpe received, but Elpizo Harpe can still inflict more damage with his additional effect. He'll deal as much damage to them to give Soulburner the opportunity to deliver the finishing blow.

"I activate Elpizo Harpe's effect! When this card points to a monster, it gains ATK equal to the difference between that monster's ATK and our current LP!" Holysaber activates Elpizo Harpe's effect. His and Soulburner's current LP is at 1900, while Heatleo is at 2300, that makes 400 points difference, so Elpizo Harpe's ATK is raised by 400 points.

Olympios Stratos - Elpizo Harpe ATK: 2300 = 2700

Holysaber observes Ghost Girl and Blue Girl's field. Divaridis has the most troublesome effects out of all of them, but thanks to Soulburner's Gate of Fire, they negated the LP-shaving effect.

Primebanshee has the highest ATK, but her effect is not as troublesome as the Trickstars in their current situation. Lycoris and Meluseek, on the other hand, both have low ATKs, but their effects are also troublesome, especially Meluseek's effect that can attack directly and destroy a monster when inflicting damage.

With Heatleo and Elpizo Harpe, he can only attack two monsters. To choose between the four Monsters, he'd pick…

" *I'll decrease their LP as much as I can!"* Holysaber decides his two targets.

"Battle! I attack Trickstar Lycoris with Salamangreat Heatleo!" Holysaber declared his Battle Phase, first attacking the weaker Trickstar with Soulburner's ace monster.

Heatleo whirls its body, enveloping itself with burning flames, becoming a tornado of fire incinerating the Trickstar monster.

Blue Girl & Ghost Girl LP: 5500 = 5000

"Next, I attack Altergeist Meluseek with Elpizo Harpe!" Holysaber continues his second attack with his own ace monster.

Elpizo Harpse swings down his sword, cutting the mermaid-like Altergeist monster into two, destroying it.

Blue Girl & Ghost Girl LP: 5000 = 2800

"I activate Elpizo Harpe's effect! When this card inflicts Battle Damage, I can inflict damage to my opponent equal to the ATK of a monster pointed by its Link Arrow!" Holysaber activates his ace's additional effect, unleashing a stream of silver light that strikes the two women.

Blue Girl & Ghost Girl LP: 2800 = 500

With this, he has lowered their LP to red. It'll give Soulburner's bigger chances to deplete their LP on his next turn.

"I won't make it easy for you the next time!" Ghost Girl opens her face-down card, "I activate Trap Card: Altergeist Dark Mist! When an Altergeist monster I control is destroyed by Battle, I can halve the ATK of the opposing monster!"

Just as Elpizo Harpe inflicted damage to her and Blue Girl, black mist surrounds Elpizo Harpe's body, causing the Olympios Stratos monster to wobble as he feels himself growing weaker.

Olympios Stratos - Elpizo Harpe ATK: 2700 = 1350

"With this, you can't destroy neither my Primebanshee nor Blue Girl's Divaridis even if you're using Elpizo Harpe's effect." Ghost Girl tells them. This is the least she can do to lessen their danger.

"I end my turn." Holysaber finishes.

"My turn! I activate the Field Spell, Live Stage's effect!" Blue Girl reactivates her Field Spell's effect.

"Once per turn, when there's a Set card in the opponent's Spell & Trap Zone, you can Special Summon a Trickstar Token in Defense Position." Blue Girl's A.I. explains in her place. Trickstar Token is placed in the zone where Altergeist Meluseek used to be.

"If I control a Trickstar Fusion Monster or Link Monster, I can Special Summon Trickstar Hoodie from my hand!" Blue Girl summons a purple-hooded Trickstar monster in Attack Position to the zone where Lycoris originally was.

Trickstar Hoodie (FAIRY/LIGHT/EFFECT/ATK: 600/DEF: 1800/LV: 2)

"I activate my Skill! Trickstar Gig!" Blue Girl declares, causing the pink heart-shaped symbols on her outfit to glow.

"For every Trickstar monsters on my field, I send a card from the top of my Deck to the Graveyard!" Blue Girl controls three Trickstar

monsters in her Main Monster Zone, so she sends three cards to the Graveyard.

"Then, I can add a Trickstar card in my Graveyard to my hand. What I add, is this card!" Blue Girl adds a Trickstar Spell Card confidently, alarming Soulburner and Holysaber.

"I equip Trickstar Birdhelm to Divaridis!" Blue Girl once again equips a copy of Birdhelm in her hand to Divaridis.

"I'll show you the strength of my powered-up Trickstar Deck!" Blue Girl declares.

"Shine! The circuit of courage and determination!" Blue Girl summons the Link Summoning portal, setting Trickstar Hoodie and Trickstar Token to the Link Markers.

"Link Summon! Appear, Link 2, Trickstar Holly Angel!" Blue Girl summons her Blue Angel persona's ace monster. She summons it to the zone points by Primebanshee's bottom Link Marker.

"I activate Dark Mist's effect in the Graveyard! Once per turn, I can switch the zones between an Altergeist monster with another monster!" Blue Girl switches Primebanshee's position with Divaridis, placing Primebanshee to the Main Monster Zone and Divaridis to the Extra Monster Zone.

"I activate Live Stage's effect! I Special Summon a Trickstar Token next to my Trickstar Link Monster's Link Arrow!" Blue Girl summons another Trickstar Token to zone points by Divaridis' Link Marker, filling the Main Monster Zone full.

"I'll use the card I added with my Skill! Magic Card: Trickstar Fusion! I send a Fusion Material from my hand and field to the Graveyard to Fusion Summon!" Blue Girl sends Holly Angel and Trickstar Token to the Graveyard.

"I'll let you hear the song of the Trickstar! Fusion Summon! Trickstar Band Sweet Guitar!" Blue Girl summons her Fusion Monster to the zone points by Divaridis' bottom Link Arrow in Attack Position.

Trickstar Band Sweet Guitar (FAIRY/LIGHT/FUSION/ATK: 2200/DEF: 1200/LV: 7)

"A Trickstar Fusion Summon?!" Soulburner is shocked at the appearance of the Fusion Monster.

"That's not recorded in my data. It means she's continued to grow." Flame states calmly despite the sudden turn of event.

"By Fusion Summoning Sweet Guitar, take Divaridis' effect!" Blue Girl activates Divaridis' effect. The Link Monster raises her mic, the red crystal of her mic shines in response.

"That's pointless! Due to Gate of Fire, 300 or less damage is negated-"

"When linked to Sweet Guitar, a Trickstar's effect damage is doubled!" Blue Girl interrupts Soulburner. As Sweet Guitar is linked to Divaridis' bottom Link Arrow, Divaridis' effect damage is doubled, making it 400 damage in total.

Sweet Guitar plays her guitar, amplifying Divaridis' sound wave as she sings, striking Soulburner and Holysaber with intensified damage.

Holysaber & Soulburner LP: 1900 = 1500

"Since I dealt you effect damage, I activate Sweet Guitar's effect! She gains ATK equal to the Trickstar's effect damage!" Blue Girl increases Sweet Guitar's ATK by 400.

Trickstar Band Sweet Guitar ATK: 2200 = 2600

"I banish Trickstar Fusion from my Graveyard to activate its effect! I can add a Trickstar to my hand, but the monster I get can't be

summoned or Special Summoned this turn." Blue Girl banishes his Magic Card and then adds Calobane to her hand.

"I'll end you this turn! Battle! I attack Elpizo Harpe with Sweet Guitar! Ambitious Code!" Blue Girl declares her Battle Phase.

Band Sweet Guitar plays her guitar with strongest intensity from before, unleashing barrages of destructive soundwaves towards the Olympios Stratos monster.

"At this moment, I send Salamangreat Racoon from my hand to the Graveyard to activate its effect! I regain LP equal to the opponent's monster's ATK!" Soulburner sends Racoon to the Graveyard, recovering his and Holysaber's LP by 2600.

Holysaber & Soulburner LP: 1500 = 4100

"And you can't activate Magics, Traps, or Monster Effects during this Battle! That includes Calobane's effect in your hand." Soulburner adds, emphasizing Calobane. "And Elpizo Harpe cannot be destroyed by Battle!"

"But you still take damage!" Blue Girl reminds them.

A barrier is formed in front of Elpizo Harpe, protecting it from Sweet Guitar's attack.

Holysaber & Soulburner LP: 4100 = 2850

"Again, I attack Elpizo Harpe with Altergeist Primebanshee!" Blue Girl declares her second attack using Ghost Girl's ace monster.

The four snakes on Primebanshee opens their mouths, shooting purplish red magical energy towards Elpizo Harpe, who is still protected by Salamangreat Racoon's barrier.

Holysaber & Soulburner LP: 2850 = 2150

"Lastly, I attack Elpizo Harpe with Divaridis!" Blue Girl declares her third and final attack.

Divaridis sings once more, unleashing destructive soundwaves from her shining red mic that is again blocked by a barrier that protects Elpizo Harpe from being destroyed.

Holysaber & Soulburner LP: 2150 = 1700

"You can't end us this turn." Soulburner retorts to her earlier statement, making Blue Girl click her tongue.

"I end my turn. It's true I couldn't defeat you this turn. But we will next turn!" Blue Girl replies.

"When Sweet Guitar attacks, her ATK return to normal at the end of turn and I can add a Trickstar monster in my Graveyard to my hand." Blue Girl concludes, reverting her Fusion Monster's ATK to normal.

Trickstar Band Sweet Guitar ATK: 2600 = 2200

"You did well, Blue Girl. Leave the rest to me, I'll be sure to finish this on my turn." Ghost Girl assures her partner. They're so close now.

"This situation is pretty bad." Soulburner states. The excitement he had earlier was starting to fade.

"You know, you could've just let them destroy Elpizo Harpe. Then, they won't be able to attack Heatleo since Divaridis and Primebanshee's ATKs are not strong enough against Heatleo. You've sealed Calobane's effect with Racoon's effect, so Blue Girl couldn't have used its effect to increase Divaridis' effect." Holysaber explains after reassessing the earlier Battle Phase. When Soulburner makes a dejected face, he quickly explains, "I'm not scolding you. I'm happy that you care enough about me that you protected my monster and I appreciate that. But you need to look closer at the bigger picture."

"Precisely. In this situation, looking from a different angle, Blue Girl failed to win and you're the one trying to seize victory." Flame joins in, looking at his dejected partner. He then pats Soulburner's Deck. "There's a card in your Deck that'll break you out of this situation."

"You mean that card." Soulburner knows which card Flame is referring to without needing to have him spell it out. True. With that card, he can swiftly win this Duel.

"My turn! Draw!" Soulburner begins his Draw Phase. When he looks at his card, however, he frowns. It's not the card that he needs. "The goddess of destiny has forsaken me."

"Goddess aren't attracted to you." Flame says nonchalantly, earning him ire from his partner, but Flame remains calm. "Instead of moaning about destiny, Draw the card yourself. Or do you lack the courage to drop to 100 LP against her combo?"

"What?!" Soulburner is offended by his partner's implication.

"Will you face your destiny or run from it? This is the turning point. If you're my partner, you should face it with confidence." Flame encourages his partner. A Duel won't be settled unless one of the players loses their entire LP. Low LP shouldn't be used as an excuse to give up, not when there's still a chance to take.

"Soulburner, as long as we still have our LP, no matter how small it is, the Duel is not over. Every move matters. Don't miss the chance that you have, even if it means we're gambling our LP for it." Holysaber agrees with Flame. It's risky, but it's worth a try than nothing at all. He refuses to lose without fighting back.

"Besides, a hero usually unleashes their power when they are in a pinch, right?" Holysaber adds grinningly to ease Soulburner's growing doubt.

"You heard him. What are you going to do now, Partner?" Flame questions Soulburner, seeing resolution lit up in his partner's eyes.

"Interesting. If you said that far, I have to do it!" Soulburner extends his hand, surprising Blue Girl and Ghost Girl.

"Burn your soul, Soulburner!" Flame exlcaims as his body envelopes in flame.

"Skill activates! I lower my LP to 100 and draw a card for every 1000 LP that I give!" The gem on Soulburner's chest glows and extends to Soulburner's right arm, heating up Soulburner's hand.

Holysaber & Soulburner LP: 1550 = 100

"Burning Draw!" Soulburner draws a card from the top of his Deck, forming a fire as he draws the card.

"You drew our card of destiny!" Flame says cheerily. He did it. His partner has drawn the card that will lead their path to victory.

"Here I go! I activate Magic Card: Fusion of Fire! I send Fusion Material Monsters to the Graveyard to Fusion Summon!" Soulburner subsequently activates the card he just drew.

"He's Fusion Summoning too?!" Ghost Girl is shocked, not expecting Soulburner to also possess a Fusion Monster.

"Fusion Monster is your secret weapon? But if you summon a monster, Divaridis and Sweet Guitar's combo will end you!" Blue Girl reminds her excited opponent.

"Are you sure?" Soulburner asks back, confusing Blue Girl. "My Fusion Monster materials are Heatleo and one Link Monster. I could've used Elpizo Harpe, but not for this time if I want to stop your combo."

"What do you mean?" Blue Girl is even more confused by that. Other than Heatleo, they only have Elpizo Harpe, a Link Monster, on their field. How else can he perform Fusion Summon if not using Elpizo Harpe?

"Fusion of Fire lets me use monsters on both our fields to Fusion Summon! I Fusion Summon using your Link Monster, Divaridis!" Soulburner answers Blue Girl's confusion, to the dismay of Blue Girl.

"Appear! The origin of a crazy soul! The magical beast whose flesh gathers the weapons of evil beasts! Fusion Summon! Salamangreat Violet Chimera!"

Divaridis and Heatleo turn into blue and orange flames, forming into a tornado of flames mixing together until it erupts like a volcano, the purple lava from the eruption then takes shape of a violet-colored Salamangreat Fusion Summon.

Salamangreat Violet Chimera (CYBERSE/FIRE/LINK/ATK: 2800/DEF: 2000/LV: 8)

"Getting materials, stopping combos, eliminating monsters, and summoning his ace. He did all this at once?" Ghost Girl looks at the Fusion Monster in disbelief.

"Violet Chimera's effect activates! When it was Fusion Summoned, until the end of turn, its ATK is increased equal to the half the total ATK of the Fusion Material Monsters used for its Fusion Summon!" Soulburner increases Violet Chimera's ATK by 2050.

Salamangreat Violet Chimera ATK: 2800 = 4850

"Battle! Violet Chimera attacks Trickstar Band Sweet Guitar!" Soulburner declares his Battle Phase. If this attack hits Blue Girl and Ghost Girl's LP at 500, it'll be over for them.

"No! I won't let it end now! I activate Calobane's effect in my hand! By sending this card to the Graveyard, Sweet Guitar's effect is doubled!" Blue Girl doubles Sweet Guitar's ATK.

Trickstar Band Sweet Guitar ATK: 2200 = 4400

"And I'll reduce the damage that we'd take!" Ghost Girl joins in, "At this moment, I also activate Altergeist Dark Mist's effect in my Graveyard! By banishing it and an Altergeist monster I control, I can recover LP equal to the destroyed Altergeist monster's ATK!"

Ghost Girl banishes Dark Mist and then destroys Primebanshee, recovering hers and Blue Girl's LP equal to Primebanshee's ATK, which is 2100.

Blue Girl & Ghost Girl LP: 500 = 2600

With this, Blue and Ghost Girl can still survive this turn by still having 2150 LP left.

At least, that's what they've believed.

"We knew you'd do that." Soulburner smiles expectantly. "You examined your own weaknesses, and you chose a card to deal with it. That's why I knew you'd use Calobane!"

"Using Dark Mist to increase your LP to lower further damage you'll take is a smart move on your part, but that's the only extent you can." Holysaber remarks. He didn't expect Dark Mist to have that kind of effect, but ultimately, it's still not enough to stop Violet Chimera.

"What are you trying to say?" Blue Girls questions sharply.

"I activate Violet Chimera's additional effect! When it's battling a monster whose current ATK is different from its original ATK, I can double Violet Chimera's ATK during the damage calculation!"

Salamangreat Violet Chimera ATK: 4850 = 9700

"An ATK of 9700?!" Blue Girl is almost dumbstruck. With that ATK, the damage they receive would be 5300. Their LP is far too low to survive that attack.

"Go! Violet Soul!"

Violet Chimera propels itself by boosting the blue flames coming from its back, flying towards Sweet Guitar until it's close enough to slash down its arm blade, destroying the Trickstar Fusion Monster.

Blue Girl & Ghost Girl LP: 2600 = 0

Blue Girl and Ghost Girl are hurtling down the cliff, where they land on a ledge. Soulburner and Holysaber flies to them, the two women are still struggling to get a hold of themselves after the strong impact.

"Blue Girl, you're stronger than before. And Ghost Girl, you peroperly adjust your strategy to match with your partner's combo." Soulburner acknowledges the Trickstar and Altergeist users.

"But you didn't have an excellent A.I. like me." Flame tells them.

"Continue being my compassionate observer." Soulburner doesn't retort this time. He did get motivated thanks to Flame, and of course, Holysaber.

"You won this Duel because of the bond between an A.I. and a human?" Blue Girl looks at the duo in bewilderment. Ignis, an A.I., is a program. And yet, Soulburner's behavior to Flame is no different from how humans interact with each other. Soulburner and Flame act like they're… truly partners. Not just them. Thinking more about it, Playmaker and Ai also act the same.

Holysaber jumps down from his D-Board. He reaches out his hand, holding Blue Girl by her arm and seemingly helps her up…

SLAP

Right as she stands up, a nice sharp sound rings out around them. Blue Girl faces to the side and her cheek turns red following the sharp sound. Nobody was expecting that, as their eyes went wide. Holysaber brings his hand back down to his side and glares at the Trickstar user with a sharp expression.

"H-Holysaber, what are you doing?!" It takes a few seconds until Soulburner fully processes what Holysaber has done.

"You mentioned the Lost Incident. That means, you knew what happened to us." Holysaber starts talking, his eyes are colder the more he speaks. He must speak his mind now otherwise he'd lose it. He can't let Blue Girl slide after everything she said.

"You knew what the Knights of Hanoi did to us to create the Ignis, the suffering that we were forced to endure for those six months." The more he speaks, the colder his tone is. His mind drifts to the time he spent in captivity, where he must Duel or he'd be starved to death.

"SOL Technologies decided to bury the incident under the rubble because they don't want to lose their source to make money. Despite knowing this, you demanded us to give Ai and Flame to SOL Technologies?" Holysaber grabs Blue Girl by her collar, pulling her closer to him harshly.

"Who do you think you are?" Holysaber can barely restrain his anger anymore. After that incident, he lived a life filled with nothing but despair. He had given up on the world, on himself, that he believed death was his only salvation. That's all because those responsible for the incident got away with it. And Blue Girl spoke like his suffering is but a trivial matter.

Holysaber roughly pushes Blue Girl, pinning her back to the ledge behind her.

"If we're using your words… Rather than those money-hungry bastards who's more than happy to overlook our suffering, I believe that us, the victims who had to endure those tortures to create the Ignis that are based on us have more rights to keep the Ignis." All the seven Ignis were created based on them. Their partners. So, it's only fitting for the Ignis to be by their side.

"Knights of Hanoi might be the culprit behind the Lost Incident. But to me, SOL Technologies is equally guilty. They knew about the incident and covered it up to avoid responsibility, so they can keep their pocket money full." SOL Technologies got a lot of profit from using the beings created from their suffering, while they must live with the trauma that keeps haunting them, not giving them a chance to be freed from their unending fear. It's incredibly unfair.

"It must be nice being an outsider like you. You think you can just say anything you want because it has nothing to do with you. So what if we suffered? As long as you can get the Ignis, then what happened to us means nothing to you. Isn't that it?" Holysaber says sarcastically, his tone is filled with evident resentment that threatens to explode.

"No! I just-" Blue Girl wants to deny his accusation, but she can't say anything when faced with Holysaber's rageful gaze.

"If this is how you're doing things, be sure to tell your brother once you're back that his help is unnecessary." Holysaber says coldly before letting go of Blue Girl's collar and pushes her back.

Ghost Girl can't defend Blue Girl on this one. Even she has to agree that her partner is the one in the wrong here. And not just at this moment, Blue Girl has not been in brightest mindset since they entered the gate. She was acting irresponsibly and just did her own thing. The way she just demanded the Ignis to be handed over has crossed the line and blew their chance to settle things peacefully. She could understand Blue Girl was sick and tired of being saved by others, but the decisions she had made this far were not the best way to start.

However, Ghost Girl feels she was also at fault. She gave up getting her to listen too easily. As the one who has more tons of experience than Blue Girl does and being an adult, she should've guided her younger partner better and made more efforts to stop her from making the wrong decision.

Blue Girl is too shocked to react that she's speechless. She just let her back hit the ledge and slid back down on her knees. She remains silent on her spot with her face down, not daring to look up at Holysaber's face. Holysaber doesn't say anything further, he merely brings out an orb of purple data and then throws it at the unmoving Blue Girl.

"Blue Girl!" Ghost Girl shouts out, shocked as her partner disintegrated into blue data before she reached her. She turns to Holysaber for answer, "What did you do to her?"

"I had her logged out. Rest assure that she's not harmed." Holysaber answers simply, his expression and tone are still stern. "You and your partner have lost the Duel, so both of you will withdraw for today."

Ghost Girl won't argue. They lost the Duel fair and square. And without her partner, there's nothing much she can do on her own against Holysaber, Soulburner, and Playmaker together.

"You're right. But I can't promise this will be the last time you'll see us. We'll meet again later. Hopefully, the next time we meet, it's under a better circumstance." Ghost Girl genuinely hopes that what happened today won't be repeated. She'll need to talk with Aoi once she's back.

"Then use this," Flame holds up an identical orb of data that Holysaber used on Blue Girl, giving it to Soulburner.

"What's this?" Soulburner asked, taking the orb.

"A copy of the escape program I received from Ghost Girl." Flame answered. Just in case, he decided to make a copy of the escape program when they were on their way into the gate.

"Here." Soulburner throws the program to Ghost Girl, which Ghost Girl accepted with a smile.

"You might be cuter than Ai-chan." Ghost Girl tells Flame, winking at him.

"Eh?!" Flame's cheeks instantly turn pink at the compliment.

"I'll withdraw for today! Let's meet again someday." Ghost Girl logs out.

"She's a goddess!" Flame said with his still blushing face, completely charmed. He did say he never said Ghost Girl was a beauty, but that doesn't mean he believes Ghost Girl is ugly. She's certainly pretty and she's got good eyes. Looking closer, perhaps it's not an exaggeration to call her beautiful, she did look shining just now.

"Don't be serious…" Soulburner said in disbelief at his Ignis. He turns to Holysaber, who is still standing on the spot where Blue Girl was. His stern face has loosened up a bit, but Soulburner can see there's still some bitterness.

"Holysaber…" Soulburner approaches his friend with concern.

Holysaber gasps softly when he hears his name being called. He lets out the breath that he has been holding. Along with that breath, he is drown by a sense of shame slowly flowing into him. He had lost it. How long has it been since he lashed out like that? He even raised his hand against a girl who had already lost. So much thinking he had gotten better at controlling his emotions. He still has a long way to go.

"Sorry. I showed you something unsightly." Holysaber apologized to the two Fire users. That could've been an opportunity to gain more allies, but he totally blew it. He should've spoken more gently after the Duel was over. Like, telling them to tell Akira that if he wanted to talk with Ai and Flame, then he only need to ask Playmaker for a chance to speak with them.

"I'm sorry too, Flame. I didn't mean to objectify you and the other Ignis…" Holysaber turns to Flame apologetically, feeling even more

ashamed. He knows that the Ignis are not just ordinary A.I.s, they are living beings with free will like humans are. They don't deserve to be treated as properties that can be taken or given so freely like a bargain sale. And yet, he spoke as if Ai and Flame are things that he owns. No matter how emotional he was, what he said was inexcusable.

"You don't need to apologize. I don't trust SOL Technologies for the same reason." Soulburner smiles in understanding. What Blue Girl said to them also sounded unpleasant to hear for him as a victim of the Lost Incident. Though he felt quite bad for Blue Girl being slapped, he was relieved when Holysaber told her off in their defense. If Playmaker and Ai were here, they wouldn't blame Holysaber either.

"That's right. I know you didn't mean what you said. With her attitude, it's normal to be angry. Blue Girl was the one in the wrong there, so don't beat up yourself too much, Holysaber." Flame leans closer and pat Holysaber's arm to comfort him and shows he's not angry in the slightest. It must be pent up frustrations that have built up overtime. Better to let it all out now than keep bottling them up.

"You're not the only one getting fired up like that. I did the same too before." Soulburner remembers when he used to beat up people for getting on his wrong side. Compared to what he did, Holysaber's slap was still far more lenient. Now that they have each other's back, they'll learn together not to let the incident control them.

"We'll get through this together, 'kay?" Soulburner extends a fist to Holysaber, going for a fist bump as an encouragement to the Olympios Stratos user.

Holysaber feels more at ease seeing the fist offered to him. He is ready to raise his own fist to bump it to Soulburner's until the Salamangreat user suddenly wobbles and falls to one knee. He then holds a hand to his head, indicating that he feels dizzy.

"Are you alright?" Holysaber looks up and down at Soulburner. He doesn't see anything severe, but judging from his body gestures, the Salamangreat user is not in good shape.

"Sorry, it's always like this after I used Burning Draw." Soulburner's body won't listen no matter how much he wants to move on. Like it or not, he must take a rest for several minutes at the minimum. If he forces himself, he'll only slow his friends down. "You go on ahead. I'll catch up to you and Playmaker."

Holysaber isn't sure of leaving Soulburner and Flame by themselves here when there's so little to know about this world that Windy created. Even though Ai and Flame trust Windy, Holysaber cannot. But they can't leave Playmaker and Ai alone either. If Bohman is here, it's most likely that Playmaker and Ai will encounter him. Bohman has an accomplice, that boy named Haru. Before, he only watched from the side, but there's no guarantee that Haru will stay quiet this time. Taking on two people alone won't be easy no matter how skilled Playmaker is. He can't let Playmaker fight alone.

Holysaber helps Soulburner to sit down on the ledge before riding his D-Board again. He and Soulburner exchange nods before departing to follow Playmaker and Ai.

NEXT CHAPTER PREVIEW:

Chapter 8 - Young Warrior of Light : As Soulburner used up most of his strength during the Tag Duel, Holysaber goes ahead to catch up to Playmaker and Ai. On his way, Bohman's younger brother, Haru, blocks his path to prevent Holysaber from interfering with Bohman and Playmaker's Duel, commencing a Duel of their own between them.

LIST OF ORIGINAL CARDS:

Holysaber's Cards

Olympios Stratos - Phyrges (CYBERSE/DIVINE/EFFECT/ATK: 1600/DEF: 1200/LV: 3): When a Link Monster is Special Summoned to your field, you can Special Summon this card from hand or Graveyard. By Releasing this card, you can move a Link Monster in your Extra Monster Zone to a zone pointed by the Link Monster's Link Arrow.

Soulburner's Cards

Salamangreat Triangle (Quick-Play Spell): Target 1 Salamangreat Link Monster you control that was Link Summoned using 3 FIRE Monsters as materials; that Link Monster is unaffected by monster effects this turn.

Ghost Girl's Cards

Altergeist Cursed Tomb (Trap): If this card is Set by the effect of an Altergeist monster, it can be activated the turn it was Set. You can send 1 Altergeist card from your Deck to your Graveyard and then Set an Altergeist Magic or Trap Card. You can destroy this card to Special Summon 1 Altergeist monster or monster treated as Altergeist monster that was destroyed this turn.

Altergeist Dark Mist (Trap): When an Altergeist monster you control is destroyed by Battle, you can halve the ATK of the opposing monster that destroyed the Altergeist monster. When this card is in the Graveyard, once per turn, you can switch the position of your Altergeist Monster with another Monster. you can banish it and an Altergeist monster you control, recover your LP equal to the ATK of the banished Altergeist monster.

AUTHOR'S NOTE:

Originally, I meant for this to be two separate Duels between Soulburner vs Blue Girl like in the anime, and then Holysaber vs Ghost Girl. But after considering their situation, I concluded that having a Tag Duel would be more logical than two separate Duels.

The beginning and the end of the Duel are not so different from the one in the anime because even with the addition of Holysaber and Ghost Girl, Blue Girl and Soulburner should still show their skills more here. I promised that the girls would get their moments to shine, but as I said before, it'll take a while. I especially couldn't cheer for Blue Girl here when I watched this episode in the anime.

Perhaps you think that Holysaber slapping Blue Girl was too much, but honestly, I don't believe it was. Blue Girl already heard what happened during the Lost Incident, the suffering that Playmaker and Soulburner had to go through. But even knowing this, she still dared to tell them to give Ai and Flame to them because the Ignis were originally under control of SOL Technologies, as if she's overlooking the crucial detail of the Lost Incident victims being tortured to create the Ignis and SOL Technologies hid this truth for their own greed. I was very frustrated when Blue Girl said this. I understand she was tired of being saved by others and wished to help her brother, but that didn't excuse her words and actions. To an extent, Holysaber in this episode expressed my frustration towards Blue Girl. Especially, Holysaber suffered to the point of developing suicidal urges, so Blue Girl's remark sounded that she didn't care to him, hence, his reaction.

The next chapter will feature Holysaber vs Haru. I never like how Haru was completely sidelined until his last moment in the anime. He has so much potential as an antagonist, and he could've shown another facet of Bohman's character due to their bonds as brothers. I'll be sure to give him more chances to appear in this story. And I already planned new Olympios Stratos monsters with more unique effects. I've been itching to write the Duel between them. (^w^)

TRIVIA:

- Etruscan architecture that described Windy's temple is an ancient Rome architecture created between about 900 BC and 27 BC, when the expanding civilization of ancient Rome finally absorbed Etruscan civilization. From about 630 BC, Etruscan architecture was heavily

influenced by Greek architecture, which was itself developing through the same period. In turn it influenced Roman architecture, which in its early centuries can be considered as just a regional variation of Etruscan architecture. But increasingly, from about 200 BC, the Romans looked directly to Greece for their styling, while sometimes retaining Etruscan shapes and purposes in their buildings.

- Phyrges is based on the Phrygians, an ancient Greek umbrella term to describe an ancient Indo-European speaking people who inhabited central-western Anatolia (modern-day Turkey) in antiquity.

- Melpomene mask is a mask of tragedy, one of a pair of two masks known as Comedy and tragedy masks, one laughing and one crying. The crying mask is often ascribed the name Melpomene, after the Muse of tragedy in Greek mythology. Melpomene is described as singing songs of mourning for people of note after they die, particularly for poets.

Young Warrior of Light

RESPONSE TO REVIEW:

Big thanks to ***tsukikami02, HunterHQ, Guests, kaiser younes, Ulrich362, Yu fujiki, T.V. 2000*** for reviewing theprevious chapter.

tsukikami02: Thank you for pointing out the repeated sentence. I'll do my best to be more careful from now on.

HunterHQ: The abusive part is actually more for comical purposes, not really serious abuse. Looks like I didn't describe it too well. And yes, Knight/Shion is fond of foods like durian and escargot.

Obviously, Divine Ignis is still alive, you'll see him later. Windy's eyes had already turned red when Ai and the others met him in the anime, and Flame mentioned that he and Lightning destroyed the Cyberse World together, so I assumed that yeah, he was already reprogrammed and attacked his partner by this time.

kaiser younes: You'll have to wait and see for yourself in later chapters.

Ulrich362: Err… I didn't expect that much of a reaction from you regarding Aoi. I'm sorry if I upset you. But I can't promise not to give the girls anymore content, because I've great plans for the girls, especially Kazue who'll have her first victory in her record soon. I have no intention to make them pathetic weaklings here. In the anime, Aoi only truly reconsider her view about the Ignis and the Lost Incident after Earth's death and learning about Miyu. In this fic, I decided to give her an early starting point that'll make her realize how insensitive she was.

Yu fujiki: Sorry, but I can't confirm nor deny that question. You'll have to continue to read the story to find out.

T.V. 2000: Knight's "cruelty" is actually not so cruel as Queen, it's more for a comical purpose rather than a serious one.

Chapter 8

Young Warrior of Light

(Wakaki Hikari no Senshi)

What lies beyond the canyon is a vast sky filled with a blond shade of yellow. For someone who just comes out of the canyon, that would be the first sight to see. It's seemingly nothing but an endless cloud-filled sky. However, if they fly a bit further forward to where the sun is, they'll eventually find six columns in the style of Roman Doric architecture that would crumble upon arrival, revealing two Roman gladiator statues.

On top of each statues' hands, stands Playmaker and his target - Bohman.

Unlike the first time they met, Bohman is adorned with graphite armor-based with a golden belt, and white sections on the segmented torso plates, the sides down the armor kilt, and the legs and waist area. The armor also sports Royal Fuchsia sections on the vambraces, knee and ankle areas, and the collar area around his neck that's connected on the back armor, and the armor sleeves on his arms are divided underneath the shoulders. The collar, large shoulder pads, inner shoulder pads, the protruding collars on the arm sleeves, the wrist section on the vambraces and the studs on the fingerless gloves have a golden colored rim.

The two of them are in the middle of a Master Duel. The one who is overseeing the Duel between them is standing on top of the statue on Bohman's side. A young boy with blond hair and orange and red

highlights, the one who had previously claimed to be Bohman's younger brother.

Haru.

Unlike his older brother's avatar, Haru's is still the same as before. He still wears a blue long-sleeved shirt with a red tie and a white blazer with yellow accents, plus a large red star on his collar, orange pants with yellow and blue accents, a pink belt with silver and blue details, and yellow-white shoes with pink trim and stars.

Just like what happened the first time, Haru was instructed to watch the Duel by his master. Record the data from this Duel and see how far Bohman is progressing at this stage.

However, he then senses someone unexpected is coming closer.

Holysaber.

Though he is aware that Playmaker came to this world together with Holysaber and Soulburner, he had expected Blue Girl and Ghost Girl to give more of a fight, at least long enough until this Duel is over.

"You know what you need to do with Holysaber on his way here."

A voice came from the back of the statue's head. Haru heard the voice, but his gaze remained focused on the Duel without turning behind.

"You just need to buy enough time until this Duel is over." The voice tells him.

Hearing what the voice said irritates him. "I won't be buying time. I'll defeat him and retrieve the Divine Deck from him." Haru retorts, which is responded with a sigh from the other.

"I know about your new card. Take this as a warning, Divine cards are special. The power of the Divine only belongs to the Divine ones. Perhaps you can damage the Divine ones, but making their power

your own is something beyond you. Beyond everyone. That includes me, you, and your master."

From the sound of the voice's foot, the owner of the voice was just leaning on the statue and now stands straight, indicating they're going to leave.

"Good luck."

After saying those words, like the blowing wind, the presence at the back of the statue disappears, leaving the offended Haru by himself. They didn't say it, but the implication is clear. They are certain that he won't win. They and their master consider Holysaber in high regard. Haru had seen Holysaber's Duel against Blood Shepherd, and he admits that Holysaber is a strong Duelist, but Haru is confident with his own skill. Other than his Divine Deck, Holysaber is not an equal threat compared to Playmaker and Soulburner, who have their Ignis partners by their side.

Haru turns to the direction where Holysaber is coming from.

" *It's good that Soulburner is not with him. It'd be more troublesome if he comes too."* Haru thinks to himself. If Soulburner also comes, it'll be difficult for him to stop them both, one may Duel him, and the other will use that opportunity to go to this place.

This Duel against Playmaker is necessary for Bohman to grow as their master wishes. Distraction or interruption are not permitted.

Haru knows immediately what he must do.

Holysaber sees two Roman gladiator statues ahead of him. As there are no other things other than those two giant statues, that must be where Playmaker is, and possibly, Bohman. With his destination in sight, Holysaber flies faster.

Alas, there's always something or someone that makes things difficult for him.

Two golem-like hands suddenly burst out from under the clouds. If not for his reflexes, Holysaber would've collided against it. The hands then open their palms, facing each other.

"Going somewhere?"

Holysaber stops when Haru arrives on his D-Board and then lands on one of the palm statues. This prompts Holysaber to jump down as well, standing on the other palm statue, facing the boy who claimed to be Bohman's younger brother, or so what he heard from Playmaker.

"Playmaker and Bohman are over there, aren't they?" Holysaber questions the boy, looking at the two gladiator statues behind Haru.

"My brother is having an important Duel right now. Wouldn't want someone to ruin it." Haru says.

"Speak no more. I must defeat you if I want to go to them, is what you're trying to say, right?" Holysaber raises his Duel Disk, knowing there is no other choice if he wants to proceed.

"That right." Haru also raises his Duel Disk in response.

"This is an unexpected opportunity for me." Holysaber wants to go help Playmaker immediately. But on second thought, this Duel is not a bad idea. Haru is Bohman's younger brother. Even if Haru doesn't have Jin's consciousness data with him, he must have other information. "I'll make you spill out everything!"

Haru is ticked off hearing his opponent's declaration. "You think you already won? Don't get cocky!"

The Duel field is formed in the gap between the two palm statues where Holysaber and Haru are standing.

"Duel!"

Holysaber LP: 4000

Haru LP: 4000

"I'm going first. When there are no monsters in the Main Monster Zone, I can Special Summon Hydradrive Booster from my hand." Haru summons a winged serpentine monster in Attack Position.

Hydradrive Booster (CYBERSE/EARTH/EFFECT/ATK: 0/DEF: 0/LV: 1)

" *A Hydradrive monster. He is using Hydradrive Deck like Bohman…"* What Holysaber knows about Bohman and Haru is from what Playmaker told him. Haru didn't Duel before, but Holysaber had heard about Bohman's Deck. A main focus on Hydradrive Link Monsters is that all of them are Anti-Support for the monsters' elements. How many elements that the Hydradrive Deck can handle is not yet known though. However, considering Divine is an ultra-rare element, Holysaber doubts Haru has any DIVINE-Attribute monster. That is one advantage that Holysaber has.

" *But it's possible that he already came prepared against my Deck like Blue Girl and Ghost Girl did. I can't give him an opening."* His opponent is the accomplice of the guy who had stolen Jin's consciousness data. He won't take him lightly.

"Appear! My circuit!" Haru summons the Link Portal, setting Booster to the Bottom Link Marker.

"Link Summon! Link 1, Coolant Hydradrive!" Haru Link Summons Coolant Hydradrive to the Extra Monster Zone in Attack Position.

Coolant Hydradrive (CYBERSE/WATER/LINK/ATK: 1000/LNK: 1/LM: Bottom/LNK: 1)

"I activate Magic Card: Hydradrive Rebuild. I destroy Hydradrive monster I control." Haru destroys his Link Monster just as he summoned it, confusing Holysaber.

"When Coolant Hydradrive was destroyed by Battle of card effect, I can Special Summon a Hydradrive Token." Haru summons a Token in Attack Position to the Main Monster Zone.

"I activate Hydradrive Rebuild's additional effect. When the monster destroyed by this card activates its effect in the Graveyard this turn, I can Special Summon one Hydradrive monster from my Graveyard." Haru revives Coolant Hydradrive that he destroyed through Rebuild's effect to the Main Monster Zone in Attack Position.

"However, on the turn this effect is activated, that monster cannot attack, and its effects are negated, also it's destroyed during the End Phase." Haru adds before taking a card from his hand, "I activate Magic Card: Hydradrive Utilization. I pay 500 LP to banish a Hydradrive monster from my Graveyard and add a monster with the same name from my Deck to my hand."

HARU LP: 4000 = 3500

Haru banishes Hydradrive Booster and then adds a second copy of Booster to his hand.

"When my LP is below 4000, I can activate my Skill: Marker's Portal!" Haru raises his hand as he activates his Skill.

"Using a Skill during Master Duel?!" Holysaber is taken aback. Skill should only be used in Speed Duel. For Haru to use it during Master Duel, that makes it clear that their opponents have no intention to play fair. If Haru is capable, then Bohman certainly can do the same.

"I can activate a Link Spell Card from my Deck. Due to my Skill, this card cannot be negated or destroyed by the opponent's effect." As Haru declares so, three arrows of light fall down to his Spell & Trap Zone, revealing Judgment Arrows.

" *It's here. The Link Spell that Playmaker warned me about."* Holysaber looks at the Link Spell cautiously. He had expected to see

the card in this Duel, but never thought that Haru would use it right on his first time.

"From my hand, I summon Hydradrive Booster." Haru summons the second copy of Booster that he just added to his hand.

"Once more, my circuit!" Haru summons the Link Portal for the second time, setting the second Booster to the Bottom Link Marker.

"Link Summon! Appear, Link 1, Flow Hydradrive!" Haru summons green lizard-like Link Monster to the Extra Monster Zone in Attack Position.

Flow Hydradrive (CYBERSE/WIND/LINK/ATK: 1000/LM: Bottom/LNK: 1)

"Appear for the third time, my circuit!" Haru summons the Link Portal again, this time setting Hydradrive Token to the Bottom Link Marker.

"Link Summon! Appear, Link 1, Coolant Hydradrive!" Haru summons the second Coolant to the zone pointed by Flow Hydradrive's Bottom Link Arrow.

"Appear for the fourth time, my circuit!" Haru summons the Link Portal and then sets Flow Hydradrive to the Left Link Marker and a Coolant Hydradrive to the Right Link Marker.

"Link Summon! Appear, Link 2, Twin Hydradrive Knight!" Haru summons a humanoid knight with twin swords to the Main Monster Zone pointed by Judgment Arrows' Link Arrow in Attack Position.

Twin Hydradrive Knight (CYBERSE/LINK/EARTH/ATK: 1800/LM: Left, Right/LNK: 2)

"Because Twin Hydradrive is Link Summoned, I can activate its effect to change its Attribute to that of the original Attributes of the Link Monsters used for its Link Summon." Haru changes his Link 2 Monster to both WIND and WATER.

"I set a card and end my turn." Haru concludes.

"He changes his monster's Attribute knowing that it won't make a difference since my monsters are DIVINE Attribute. But it doesn't look like he doesn't have any plans. Is it because of that Set card?" Holysaber looks at Haru's face-down card.

" *That's right. I didn't get a chance to use that card."* Holysaber recalls the four cards he got from his Skill during his Speed Duel against Knight. He had used three cards back then. There is one last card that he didn't get to use because Afroditi was enough to help him win.

" *Time for me to try it out."* Holysaber makes his decision. But first, before he can use it, there are steps that he must do first.

"I activate Field Spell: Mount Olympus." As Holysaber activated the Field Spell, their surroundings change to that of a grassy field filled with clouds and white pillars in the shape of 12 Olympian Gods in Greek mythology.

"When Mount Olympus is activated, I can add 1 Olympios Stratos Monster from my Deck to my hand." Holysaber adds Kalimavkion to his hand.

"Once per turn, I can discard a card in my hand to Special Summon Level 5 or lower Olympios Stratos Monster from my Deck in Defense Position." Holysaber discards one card and then Special Summon Kalimavkion, the monster he previously added with Mount Olympus' effect, to the Main Monster Zone in Attack Position.

"Come forth, the circuit that lights up the future!" Holysaber summons the Link Portal. Due to Kalimavkion's effect, it's treated as two materials for Special Summon, allowing Holysaber to set it on two Link Markers, one to the Bottom-Left Link Marker, and one to the Right Link Marker.

"Link Summon! Appear, Link 2, Olympios Stratos - Pythia!" Holysaber summons a humanoid female monster dressed in an red Greek dress with golden straps, a long skirt with the hem ending just above her orange-sandaled feet, and two white sashes; a tight one under her bust to give her a tiny waist and a loosened one tied at her right side by a golden spiral pendant around her wide hips. She appears in the Extra Monster Zone.

Olympios Stratos - Pythia (CYBERSE/DIVINE/LINK/ATK: 1800/LM: Bottom-Left, Right/LNK: 2)

" *He's not using Pendulum Summon?"* Haru wonders. He'd understand if Holysaber refrained from using Pendulum Summon during Speed Duel due to the restriction, but in Master Duel, there's less restriction, so it shouldn't be much of a problem for the Olympios Stratos user to use Pendulum Summon.

"When a DIVINE Monster is Special Summoned, I can Special Summon Olympios Stratos - Lyra from my hand." Holysaber summons a childlike humanoid monster with a white single sleeveless Greek garb and brown sandals while holding a golden harpe.

Olympios Stratos - Lyra (CYBERSE/DIVINE/EFFECT/ATK: 400/DEF: 600/LV: 2)

"When Lyra is Special Summoned through his own effect, I can Special Summon an Olympios Token in Defense Position." Holysaber summons a small, golden ball-like monster with four, stubby legs, the front two of which he can form little "fingers" with, a long tail that ends in a thick swirl, and two feathered wings.

"Once more, the circuit that lights up the future!" Holysaber Sets Lyra to the Upper-Right Link Marker and Olympios Token to the Left Link Marker, combining the circuits.

"Link Summon! Appear, Link 2, Olympios Stratos - Delphi!" Holysaber summons a humanoid female with the same attire as

Pythia, but yellow in color. She is summoned to the Main Monster Zone, in the zone pointed by Pythia.

Olympios Stratos - Delphi (CYBERSE/DIVINE/LINK/ATK: 1800/LM: Upper-Right, Left/LNK: 2)

"I activated Pythia and Delphi's effects. Once per turn, when both of these cards are co-linked with each other, I can inflict 300 damage to my opponent." Since both monsters' effects are the same, the total amount damage that will be inflicted is 600. Putting aside his conflict with Blue Girl, the strategy of chipping an opponent's LP through burn damage intrigued him. Holysaber couldn't help but want to try coming up with a strategy that can incorporate effect damage.

" *Inflicting effect damage right off the bat. That's new."* Based on Holysaber's Dueling record that Haru had watched, Holysaber's preferred strategy is to use Pendulum Summon to summon several monsters simultaneously to use them as Link Materials, and then overpower his enemies by increasing his monsters' ATK through the use of effects that takes advantage of his low LP. But now, not only is he not using Pendulum Summon, but he also summoned monsters that inflict effect damage. That's unusual.

Pythia and Delphi join hands, then extend their other hands forward, opening their palms together at Haru's direction. Each manifests a magic circle with a slightly different pattern. From the center of the circle, bursts of magical energies in the form of serpents shoot out, as if ready to bite off the boy.

" *But that won't be enough."* Haru grins at the incoming strike.

"Continuous Trap: Hydradrive Chain! Once per turn, when I control a Hydradrive monster, I can change the Attribute of one of my opponent's monsters to the same as one of the Hydradrive monsters that I control, and those monsters got their ATKs halved!" Haru opens his face-down card, changing Pythia and Delphi's Attributes to WATER and EARTH like Twin Hydradrive Knight.

Olympios Stratos - Pythia ATK: 1800 = 900

Olympios Stratos - Delphi ATK: 1800 = 900

"Due to Twin Hydradrive Knight's effect, as long as it's on the field, monsters with the same Attribute as it has their effects negated." The Trap summons black chains that deflect the serpents and immobilizes Pythia and Delphi.

"Battle! I attack Coolant Hydradrive with Olympios Stratos - Pythia!" Holysaber declares his Battle Phase.

Pythia let go of Delphi's hand to join both her hands together in prayer, emitting bright crimson light that gradually forms into the form of a raven with golden eyes.

"Due to Mount Olympus' effect, during Battle Phase, all Olympus Monsters I control gains 200 ATK for each Olympus Monsters in my Graveyard!" Holysaber has Kalimavkion, Lyra, and the monster he discarded through Mount Olympus' effect, making it three monsters in total, so Pythia and Delphi both gain 600 ATK.

Olympios Stratos - Pythia ATK: 900 = 1500

Olympios Stratos - Delphi ATK: 900 = 1500

"Judgment Arrows' effect! When this card is pointing to a monster, that monster's ATK is doubled!" Haru activates his Link Spell, increasing his Link Monster's ATK by 1000.

Coolant Hydradrive ATK: 1000 = 2000

"I activate Olympios Stratos - Lyra's effect from my Graveyard! When this card is in Graveyard, I can banish it to switch the ATK of one monster I control with the ATK of a monster that my opponent controls!" Holysaber banishes Lyra and picks Pythia and Twin Hydradrive Knight as his targets, switching their ATKs.

Olympios Stratos - Pythia ATK: 1500 = 2000

Coolant Hydradrive ATK: 2000 = 1500

The blazing crimson raven flies at the Hydradrive Link Monster, opening its beak and seemingly swallows Coolant Hydradrive, burning it without a trace.

Haru LP: 3500 = 3000

"When Coolant Hydradrive is destroyed, I can Special Summon Hydradrive Token in Defense Position!" Haru summons a Token right after Coolant Hydradrive was destroyed.

"I set a card and end my turn." Holysaber concludes. With his turn ended, Pythia and Delphi's ATKs returned to normal.

Olympios Stratos - Pythia ATK: 900 = 1800

Olympios Stratos - Delphi ATK: 900 = 1800

"If it weren't for Mount Olympus' effect, I would've received bigger damage. You made a mistake in setting that Field Spell. You should've used Pendulum Summon and summon your ace monster." Haru tells Holysaber.

"No. I don't think I should stick to only one strategy. Against you, I believe that there are other means to achieve the result I'm hoping for." Holysaber replies.

So far, he had been relying on Elpizo Harpe and his Pendulum Cards to defeat his opponents because he feels a great resonance with them. However, he is aware that Divine Deck has many possibilities. He can't just close his eyes to those possibilities and just repeat the same move. He must keep learning and improving his Deck to prevent his opponents from predicting his strategy.

Unfortunately, Haru doesn't take it that way.

"Are you looking down on me?" Haru glares at Holysaber.

Haru grits his teeth and clenches his fists intensely as he unwittingly remembers the words spoken to him before.

The words that keep following him everywhere no matter how much he wants it to just go away.

" *It's unfortunate, but you're a failure."*

"You don't think using your specialty against me is worth your time?" From what Haru perceived, the Olympios Stratos user believes that it's not necessary for him to use his Pendulum Cards and Elpizo Harpe because Haru is not a strong enough opponent. That infuriated the boy.

Holysaber blinks, not expecting such a reaction from his opponent. He wouldn't be doing this if he underestimated Haru. "Wait, I think you misunderstand. I want to-"

Holysaber's attempt to explain is quickly cut off by Haru, who is too angry to even bother listening to him.

"Enough excuses! I'll teach you a lesson not to underestimate me!" Haru yells furiously as he begins his turn.

"From my hand, I summon Hydradrive Bringer!" Haru summons a winged golem-like monster in Attack Position to the Main Monster Zone.

Hydradrive Bringer (CYBERSE/WIND/EFFECT/ATK: 0/DEF: 0/LV: 1)

"When Hydradrive Bringer is summoned, I can add a Hydradrive monster from my Graveyard to my hand." Haru adds Hydradrive Booster back to his hand.

"Appear! My circuit!" Haru sets the Hydradrive Token to the bottom Link Marker.

"Link Summon! Appear, Link 1, Coolant Hydradrive!" Haru once again summons another copy of Coolant Hydradrive to the zone pointed by Judgment Arrows' top Link Marker.

"I'm not done yet! Appear again, my circuit!" Haru summons the Link Portal and then prepares for his Link 2 Monster and his Effect Monster. "The summoning condition is two or more Hydradrive monsters! I set Twin Hydradrive Knight and Hydradrive Bringer!"

From the portal, a humanoid monster emerges. He wears armor on his sides with pauldrons on his shoulders and armored sleeves, with a black tight material with gold ornaments concealing his front. He's holding a golden bow paired with white arrows.

"Appear! Link 3, Archer Hydradrive Lord!" Haru summons his Link 3 monster in the zone previously occupied by Twin Hydradrive Knight, pointed by Judgement Arrows' Link Arrow.

Archer Hydradrive Lord (CYBERSE/EARTH/LINK/ATK: 2000/LM: Bottom, Bottom-Left, Upper-Right/LNK: 3)

"I activate Equip Spell: Hydradrive Impact! I equip it to Coolant Hydradrive!" Haru equips the card to his Link 1 Monster before turning to his Continuous Trap.

"I activate Hydrarive Chain's effect! I change your monsters' Attribute to the same as my monster and halve their ATKs!" Haru activates his Trap to once again change Pythia and Delphi's Attribute to WATER, the same as Coolant Hydradrive and once again halved their ATKs.

Olympios Stratos - Pythia ATK: 1800 = 900

Olympios Stratos - Delphi ATK: 1800 = 900

"When my opponent controls a monster with the same Attribute as Coolant Hydradrive, it can attack directly. And due to Hydradrive Impact's effect, all Battle Damage the equipped monster inflicts is doubled!" Haru reveals, already sporting a victorious smile.

"Battle! I attack directly with Coolant Hydradrive!" He declares Battle Phase. Due to Judgement Arrows' effect, Coolant Hydradrive's ATK is doubled.

Coolant Hydradrive ATK: 1000 = 2000

Coolant Hydradrive hisses as it looms over Holysaber, its claws raised, ready to shred the Olympios Stratos user. Even Holysaber is frozen for a second at the primal hostility displayed by the Hydradrive monster. But he quickly composes himself and presses his facedown card.

"Trap Card: Divine Evergreen! When I control a DIVINE Link Monster, all Battle Damage I receive is halved until the end of this turn!" Holysaber opens his facedown card, summoning evergreen leaves that act as a shield against Coolant Hydradrive's sharp claws. The Hydradrive Link Monster can only barely claw Holysaber.

Holysaber LP: 4000 = 2000

"Hmph. That'll only save you this turn. Before I crush you on my next turn, I'll scrap as many LP from you!" Haru is assured of his victory. He will take down Holysaber now and prove himself.

"I activate Archer Hydradrive Lord's effect! Once per turn I can change its Attribute to the same as one of the monsters that my opponent controls!" Archer Hydradrive Lord changes its Attribute to the same as Delphi, whose Attribute is WATER due to Hydradrive Chain's effect.

"Now, Archer Hydradrive, attack Delphi!" Haru declares his second attack. Due to Judgement Arrows' effect, his ATK is doubled.

Archer Hydradrive Lord ATK: 2000 = 4000

Archer Hydradrive Lord directs his arrow at Delphi, pulling the string of his bow with two arrows pointing. Once he has locked on his target, the Link 3 Hydradrive monster let go of the string, shooting

the two arrows straight through the Olympios Stratos Link Monster, destroying it. However, due to Holysaber's Divine Evergreen, the damage is halved.

Holysaber LP: 2000 = 750

Despite the damage he has suffered, Holysaber smiles back at Haru, surprising and confusing the boy.

"I activate Delphi's effect! When it's destroyed by Battle or Effect, I can destroy a Trap Card that my opponent controls!" Holysaber reveals, pointing at Hydradrive Chain.

"What?!" Haru turns to his Continuous Trap Card and sees the chains start to weaken.

Delphi's spirit comes out from the Graveyard, obliterating the chains with a simple touch of her hand, freeing Pythia from its curse.

"I was hoping that you'd destroy Pythia. Had you destroyed her, your Link Magic would've been destroyed." Holysaber admits. Opposite from Delphi, if it was Pythia that got destroyed, then he can destroy a Magic Card. If Pythia was destroyed, he could pick Judgment Arrows, and following Judgment Arrows' destruction, all the monsters pointed by Judgment Arrows would've been destroyed as well, leaving Haru defenseless.

"But your Hydradrive Chain is also troublesome, so I guess this is fine." Holysaber now has one less card to worry about. And with this, he can proceed to his next step that can turn the tide to his favor.

"I end my turn." Haru concludes reluctantly. It's frustrating since he was so close. But next time, he'll wipe out that smug face.

And following the end of Battle Phase, both of his monsters' ATK reverts to normal.

Coolant Hydradrive ATK: 2000 = 1000

Archer Hydradrive Lord ATK: 4000 = 2000

"My turn. From my hand, I summon Saint Kuriboh." Holysaber summons Saint Kuriboh in Attack Position to the Main Monster Zone.

Saint Kuriboh (CYBERSE/DIVINE/EFFECT/ATK: 300/DEF: 200/LV: 1)

Haru scoffs at the summoning of the monster.

"Saint Kuriboh now? What are you going to do with that puny monster?" Haru comments mockingly, earning him a disdain look from the said monster.

"Don't mock my ace monster." Holysaber says sharply. His voice reprimanding, his eyes express his disapproval at Haru's comment.

"Ace? That thing? You must be joking." Haru can't believe that Holysaber would actually consider such a monster to be one of his ace monsters. True, Saint Kuriboh has quite a useful effect, but that only works if it has other monsters on the field. It doesn't deserve to be called an ace monster.

Holysaber wants to rebuke Haru's attitude towards not only his ace monster, but also one of his most favorite monsters. It's obvious what his opponent is thinking about Saint Kuriboh. He cannot accept his way of thinking. But he restraints himself. He knows it's useless to convey what he believes through words against such a narrow-minded person. The only way to silence that kind of person is through demonstration. And he'll make sure to rub it on Haru's face.

"Let's make him eat his words, Saint Kuriboh." Holysaber tells his ace monster.

"Kuri!" Saint Kuriboh replies determinedly.

"I activate Magic Card: Divine Link Draw. I can Draw cards from the top of my Deck equal to the Link Rating of a DIVINE Link 3 or lower

Link Monster that I control." Holysaber controls Link 2 Pythia, so he draws two cards from the top of his Deck.

"When I control a Link Monster, I can Special Summon Olympios Stratos - Kyknos to the zone pointed by the Link Monster." Holysaber summons a swan-like monster that resembles Timios Kyknos, but smaller in size, having blonde pink feathers, and a pair of turquoise eyes. She's occupying the zone pointed by Pythia's Link Arrow where Delphi used to occupy.

Olympios Stratos - Kyknos (CYBERSE/DIVINE/PENDULUM/ATK: 1400/DEF: 800/LV: 4)

"Appear, the circuit that lights up the future!" Holysaber sets Pythia and Kyknos, setting Pythia to the Left Link Marker and Kyknos to the Bottom Link Marker.

"Link Summon! Link 2, Olympios Stratos - Toxotis!" Holysaber summons a humanoid male monster with fuchsia colored skin and angelic wing, wearing a light red chiton with an orange border, which is held by a round gold pin with a bow and arrow on his back.

Olympios Stratos - Toxotis (CYBERSE/DIVINE/LINK/ATK: 2000/LM: Left, Bottom/LNK: 2)

"When this card is on the field, you can only attack this monster or other monster with Attributes other than Divine. However, when this effect activates, he cannot be affected by other effects until the end of this turn." Holysaber states Toxotis' effect. This effect secured one of his prepared protections for Saint Kuriboh for the next turn. As the payment though, Mount Olympus' ATK increasing effect cannot be applied to Toxotis until the end of this turn.

"Battle! I attack Coolant Hydradrive with Toxotis!" Holysaber declared Battle Phase.

"You're attacking with that ATK?! Your monster would be destroyed too!" Haru reminds him. Since Coolant Hydradrive's ATK would be

doubled due to Judgment Arrows' effect, its ATK would become 2000, the exact same as Toxotis.

Coolant Hydradrive ATK: 1000 = 2000

Toxotis, following his master's command, releases his arrow, just as Coolant Hydradrive is closing in with its claws. Contrary to Haru's expectation, Toxotis' arrow pierces through Coolant Hydradrive, destroying that Link Monster alone while Toxotis remains standing on the field.

"Have you forgotten? With Saint Kuriboh's effect, all DIVINE Monsters cannot be destroyed by Battle or Effect." Holysaber reminds Haru, smiling in satisfaction. "Looks like you haven't done your homework, since you don't remember the effect of a puny monster I have here."

Haru's face slightly reddens in embarrassment at Holysaber's sarcasm. Holysaber must hold himself back from smiling wider after seeing the boy's reaction.

"I end my turn." Holysaber concludes.

Haru's fury intensified. "Talk while you can! In the end, you only got rid of Coolant Hydradrive without even lowering my LP! I'll end you now!" Even if he had lost Coolant Hydradrive, he still has Archer Hydradrive Lord. His Link 3 Monster is more than enough to finish off the Olympios Stratos user for good this turn.

"I activate Archer Hydradrive Lord's effect! Once per turn I can change its Attribute to the same as one of the monsters that my opponent controls and destroy that monster!" Haru points to Toxotis. His plan is to first destroy the Link 2 DIVINE Monster and then destroy Saint Kuriboh through Battle once Toxotis is out of the picture.

" *I'll crush his so-called ace monster!"* Haru has set his eyes on Saint Kuriboh as his target. He's looking forward to seeing how Holysaber

looks like when his beloved puny ace monster is destroyed…

[ERROR]

"Huh?" Haru is dumbfounded when a notification appears from his Duel Disk.

[EFFECT CANNOT BE ACTIVATED]

"What?! What's happening?!" Haru tries to reactivate Archer Hydradrive Lord's effect again, but the same notification keeps appearing no matter how many times he try.

On the other side of the field, Holysaber is as confused as Haru. He has readied himself to face Archer Hydradrive Lord's effect, but then this happens. The Hydradrive Link Monster cannot activate its effect. How come? It could activate it just fine against Delphi in the previous turn. Is there an error in the Duel Disk? No. Judging from Haru's expression, that is not the case. Then what is happening?

"Why?! Why can't I change the Attribute?!" Haru says in vexing tone. He could activate it when he used it on Delphi before. Why now it doesn't work? What has he done wrong?

' *Divine Cards are special.'*

Haru gasps as he recalls his earlier conversation before challenging Holysaber. That moment flows naturally in his head.

' *Power of the Divine only belongs to the Divine ones. Perhaps you can damage the Divine ones, but making their power your own is something beyond you. Beyond everyone.'*

" *Is that it?! I can't use any effect that'll make my own monster a DIVINE Attribute?!"* Haru looks at his cards and Holysaber's cards in disbelief. The only reason it was possible for him to affect Delphi before was because he changed her Attribute to WATER. But now,

because he couldn't change their Attribute, because Toxotis' Attribute remains DIVINE, he can't change it.

Is this the power of the Divine Deck's programming?

Haru grits his teeth. No. He can think about that later. Even if he can't destroy Toxotis through effect, he can still destroy it through Battle. Thanks to Judgment Arrows, Archer Hydradrive Lord's ATK is higher than Toxotis. Even if Toxotis' ATK is increased through Mount Olympus' effect, it won't be enough to hold against Archer Hydradrive Lord. And Holysaber's LP is only 750. He cannot survive 1800 damage. It's a pity that he can't destroy Saint Kuriboh, but victory in his hand.

"Battle! I attack Toxotis with Archer Hydradrive Lord!" Haru declares his Battle Phase, doubling Archer Hydradrive Lord's ATK with Judgment Arrows in the process.

Archer Hydradrive Lord ATK: 2000 = 4000

The Hydradrive Link Monster releases his three arrows, together, they form golden serpent-shaped aura towards the Olympios Stratos Link Monster.

"I activate Olympios Stratos - Lykos' effect from the Graveyard! When a DIVINE monster I control is targeted for an attack while this card is in the Graveyard, I can banish this card to end the Battle Phase!" Holysaber banishes his wolf-like monster from his Graveyard, activating its effect.

"What?!" Haru exclaims, not expecting that Holysaber still has a card that can save him from this situation.

Toxotis narrowly evades the three arrows, safely surviving the Battle Phase. With that attack passes, the Battle Phase ended.

"A card that can end Battle Phase?" Haru looks at Holysaber as realization dawns in. That card was the card that Holysaber

discarded through Mount Olympus' effect on his first turn. If he had that kind of card from the beginning, why didn't he use it before? He could've used it and saved himself from receiving so much damage.

"You bastard… ! You really are underestimating me! You didn't use that card earlier because you're playing around with me!" Haru's rage is at its peak. In his mind, he is growing larger and larger, expanding with unbearable fury, ready to explode at any second.

"Trust me. I would never seek joy in playing around with my opponent. If I am, I won't be doing this." Holysaber replies calmly. He initially never intended to rile up Haru this far. And it's true that not even once did he underestimate Haru. Although, even if he said that, it won't lessen the rage that his opponent has towards him. Besides, he also insulted Saint Kuriboh, so if Haru wants to believe that then so be it. It's partially the boy's own fault for having a short temper.

"I activate Magic Card: Resurrection of the Dead. I Special Summon a monster from my Graveyard." Holysaber revives Pythia to the Main Monster Zone in Attack Position. With this, everything is in place. The time has come.

"From my hand, I summon Olympios Stratos - Iatros." Holysaber summons Iatros to the Main Monster Zone in Attack Position.

"Appear! The circuit that lights the future!" Holysaber sets Iatros to the Bottom-Right Link Marker.

"Link Summon! Link 1, Olympios Stratos - Gondolieris!" Holysaber summons Gondolieris to the Extra Monster in Attack Position.

Olympios Stratos - Gondolieris (CYBERSE/DIVINE/LINK/ATK: 1400/LM: Bottom-Right/LNK: 1)

With this everything is in place.

"I'm doing this to fulfill the necessary condition to summon that monster." Holysaber raises his right arm above, "Come forth! The

circuit that lights up the future!"

Holysaber summons the Link Portal. He sets the Link 2 Pythia to the Bottom-Left and Bottom-Right Link Markers, and Toxotis to the Upper-Left and Top Link Markers, combining the circuit.

"God of sun who sees the future, pierce through the darkness of evil with your blinding light! Link Summon! Appear, Link 4, Olympios Stratos - Veli Apollon!" Holysaber summons a male humanoid monster with long hair resembling burning flame. He wears a red tunic with a sun in the center and a red Greek-style helmet with a yellow plume that carries white strips. He is holding a crimson-colored bow and black-colored arrows on his back.

Olympios Stratos - Veli Apollon (DIVINE/CYBERSE/LINK/ATK: 0/LM: Bottom-left, Bottom-right, Upper-left, Top/LNK: 4)

"I activate Veli Apollon's effect! Once per turn, I can change my opponent's card's Link Arrow to the same as one of the Link monsters that I control until the end of turn. In exchange, I can't attack with other Link Monster I control!" Holysaber states, pointing at Haru's Judgment Arrows. This is the moment he has been waiting for.

"What?! My Link Arrows?!" Haru is dumbstruck. He had never heard of a monster that can change the number of Link Rating. How is that even possible?

"I choose your Judgment Arrows' Link Rating and my Gondolieris' Link Arrow! Astheneia Light!" Holysaber declares.

Apollo to summon an orb of blinding light, as bright as the sun itself, changing Judgment Arrows' Link Arrow to the same as Gondolieris' Link Arrow, which is only one, the Bottom Link Arrow. Judgment Arrows' Link Arrows that previously consisted of Upper-Right, Top, and Upper-Left are now reduced to only one Bottom Arrow. And because of the change in Link Arrow, Archer Hydradrive Lord is not

pointed by Judgment Arrow, meaning its ATK won't be doubled during Battle Phase.

" *That's why he summoned Gondolieris of all the monsters he has! To stop me from using Judgment Arrows!"* Haru seethes.

"I know that getting rid of Judgment Arrows would be difficult. That's why I came up with this countermeasure." If he can't destroy it, then he'll just lessen its effectiveness. That's the idea he came up with after he got Apollon.

"But even without Judgment Arrows, my LP is still higher than yours! Even if you destroy Archer Hydradrive Lord, I still have my LP to survive for the next turn!" Haru argues.

"No. There won't be a next turn for you." Holysaber shuts down his argument, turning to Apollon, "When Apollon is Link Summoned when my LP is below 1000, it gains ATK equal to the total loss from my original LP."

Holysaber's current LP is 750. His original LP is 4000. Counting what he had lost, Apollon's ATK increased by 3250.

Olympios Stratos - Veli Apollon ATK: 0 = 3250

"ATK of 3250?!" Haru takes a step back in shock. He is once again hit with another realization. That's why Holysaber didn't use Lykos' effect until later. He purposely let himself receive huge amount of damage to increase the points for Apollon's ATK when he summons it. He had been planning this from the very beginning.

"Battle! I attack Hydradrive with Apollon!" Holysaber declares the last Battle Phase. Due to Mount Olympus' effect, Veli Apollon's ATK is increased by 200.

Olympios Stratos - Veli Apollon ATK: 3250 = 3450

"Ilios Shot!"

Apollon points his arrows at Archer Hydradrive Lord, who is also pointing his own arrows. Both Link Monsters release their arrows at the same time. Archer Hydradrive's arrows form into a golden serpent, while Apollon's arrows form into a white serpent. The two serpents wrestle against each other with their fangs, but the white serpent quickly vanquishes the golden serpent and then swallows Archer Hydradrive Lord whole, reducing the Hydradrive Monster into ashes, pushing Haru backwards.

Haru LP: 3000 = 450

"To end this, I'll let you have a taste of the attack from my ace that you called puny." Holysaber cannot let that insult towards Saint Kuriboh slide. He is proud of having Saint Kuriboh fighting by his side. Just as Saint Kuriboh is fighting for him, he will also fight for his little friend.

"Go, Saint Kuriboh! Direct Attack!" Holysaber declares his one last attack. Saint Kuriboh's ATK is also increased by 200 thanks to Mount Olympus' effect.

Saint Kuriboh ATK: 400 = 600

Saint Kuriboh flies straight at the defenseless Haru, the halo above its head shines, enveloping Saint Kuriboh in an energy light. Saint Kuriboh curls itself into a ball, tackling Haru straight to his abdomen, throwing him back.

Haru LP: 450 = 0

Haru falls on his back, groaning in pain from the last attack. Holysaber jumps to Haru's side while the boy is struggling to sit up.

"I won. You're going to answer my questions now." Holysaber demands, looking down at the boy who finally managed to sit up, glaring back at Holysaber.

Holysaber takes a step forward, ready to interrogate him, cracks suddenly appear on the statues. Gradually, the statues start to fall apart. They are collapsing. Haru takes the opportunity when Holysaber gets distracted to summon his D-Board and jumps to it, flying towards to the direction of the gladiator statues.

"Wait!" Holysaber also summons his D-Board, chasing after Haru.

Upon his arrival, the gladiator statues also collapsing, Haru is helping his brother riding on the D-Board and Playmaker is also riding on his D-Board as the statues falls beneath the clouds.

"My brother and I will come back! Stay tuned!" Haru tells Playmaker and Holysaber before disappearing into the clouds along with Bohman, leaving Playmaker and Holysaber by themselves.

"Playmaker! Holysaber!" Soon after, Soulburner and Flame arrive, sporting the same expression as them with their surroundings begins to shake and everything starts to disappear into blue data.

"The world is vanishing!" Ai says in panic.

"The whole Wind World is destabilizing!" Flame warns them.

"We'll be in trouble if we stay here. Let's use the escape program to log out!" Soulburner suggests. He activates the program immediately after he said so, logging out from the collapsing server.

Holysaber and Playmaker nod at each other, activating the program as well, escaping before they disappear into the void along with the Wind World.

NEXT CHAPTER PREVIEW:

Chapter 9 - Fumito Tohdo: Seeing everyone low in spirit due to their failure in capturing Bohman and Haru, Kazue took them to one of Hibiki Enterprise's branches for a break under the pretext of helping

the company's research. While they're bonding, Kento starts to share the memory of his late best friend.

L **IST OF ORIGINAL CARDS**

Holysaber's Card

Olympios Stratos - Pythia (CYBERSE/DIVINE/LINK/ATK: 1800/LM: Bottom-Left, Right/LNK: 2): 2 Monsters. When this card is co-linked with Olympios Stratos - Delphi, you can inflict 500 damage to your opponent once per turn. When this card is destroyed by Battle or Effect, you can destroy 1 Magic Card your opponent controls.

Olympios Stratos - Lyra (CYBERSE/DIVINE/EFFECT/ATK: 400/DEF: 600/LV: 2): When a DIVINE Monster is Special Summoned, you can Special Summon this card from your hand. And when this effect resolves, you Special Summon 1 Olympios Token in Defense Position. When you battle an opponent's monster while this card is in Graveyard, you can banish this card to switch the attack of your monster and your opponents.

Olympios Stratos - Delphi (CYBERSE/DIVINE/LINK/ATK: 1800/LM: Upper-Right, Left/LNK: 2): 2 Monsters. When this card is co-linked with Olympios Stratos - Pythia, you can inflict 500 damage to your opponent once per turn. When this card is destroyed by Battle or Effect, you can destroy 1 Trap Card your opponent controls.

Divine Evergreen (Trap Card): When you control a DIVINE Link Monster, all Battle Damage you receive is halved.

Olympios Stratos - Lykos (CYBERSE/DIVINE/EFFECT/ATK: 2000/DEF: 1200/LV: 5): When a DIVINE monster you control is targeted for an attack while this card is in the Graveyard, you can banish this card to end the Battle Phase.

Olympios Stratos - Veli Apollon (DIVINE/CYBERSE/LINK/ATK: 0/LM: Bottom-left, Bottom-right, Upper-left, Top/LNK: 4): At least 1 DIVINE Link Monster. If this card is Link Summoned while your LP is below 1000, it gains ATK equal to the total loss from your original LP. Once per turn, you can change the number of your opponent's card's Link Arrows to the same as one of the Link Monsters that you control until the end of turn.

Haru's Card

Hydradrive Chain (Continuous Trap): Once during both player's turn, you can change the Attribute of one of your opponent's monsters to the Attribute of a monster you control until the end of turn.

Archer Hydradrive Lord (CYBERSE/EARTH/LINK/ATK: 2000/LM: Bottom, Bottom-Left/LNK: 3): 2 or more Hydradrive Monsters. Once per turn, you can target one monster your opponent controls, change this card's Attribute to that monster's and destroy that monster.

AUTHOR'S NOTE:

The way the anime treated Haru has always been bothering me to this day. There were so many opportunities where they could've given Haru the spotlight, but no, they just made him another sacrificial pawn in favor of other things and completely rushed his writing. Since he and Bohman are brothers and it's evident that Haru is precious to Bohman, Haru should've been given more appearances.

This is one of those times I prefer TCG name more than OCG. Hydradrive sounds more unique and fitting for the monsters than simply Highdrive.

The next chapter is what you've been waiting for, the introduction to Kento's best friend and Kazue's boyfriend. Look forward to it~

Please do not forget to review this chapter. Your review keeps me motivated to continue writing.

TRIVIA

- Translation of the Greek names in this chapter:

1. Pythia: Based on the high priestess of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi.

2. Delphi: Based on an ancient sacred precinct and the seat of Pythia. Apollo is the patron deity of Delphi.

3. Lyra: Greek for "lyre".

4. Lykos: Greek for "wolf".

5. Veli Apollon: Veli means "arrows" and "Apollon" is how Apollo is written and pronounced in Greek.

6. Toxotis: Greek for "archer".

7. Astheneia: Greek for "illness". Apollo delivered people from epidemics, yet he is also a god who could bring ill health and deadly plague with his arrows.

8. Ilios: Greek for "sun".

Fumito Tohdo

RESPOND TO REVIEW:

Big thanks to ***tsukikami02, Ulrich362, Hikari Ignis, HunterHQ, Elfianna, Unknowedz, Guests*** for reviewing the previous chapter.

tsukikami02 : Yeah, that part is also my favorite to write. Hehehe.

Ulrich362 : Trust me. I wholeheartedly agree with you when it comes to the female characters in YGO. SEVENS and Go Rush handled their female characters much better now, so I hope in the future they learn from this and improve how they're writing the female characters. Oh, you don't need to worry, I have no intention to make Aoi moping for a long time. And thank you for pointing out that mistake. I forgot to revise that part.

Hikari Ignis : No. I'm not going to quote that line.

HunterHQ : Bohman is too focused on dueling Playmaker, so even if he knew, he couldn't interfere because he's too busy dealing with Playmaker. Divine Attribute in my story works differently from the original. I can't explain further without spoiling the story. And no, controlling a monster and taking their Attribute and/or effects are two different things.

Elfianna : Thank you for reading. I'm glad you like this story. But VRAINS fanfic with OC-insert that I know all have male OC as protagonists, is there a VRAINS OC-insert fanfic where the protagonist is a female?

Unknowedz : Yes, it is. You'll learn more as you read the story.

Chapter 9

Fumito Tohdo

(Tōdō Fūmito)

Cafe Nagi - Stardust Road - Den City

Once they logged out from Windy's world that had collapsed, Kento and the others gathered at Cafe Nagi to share information that they got. From Windy's story, their encounter with Blue Girl and Ghost Girl that revealed Akira wishes to meet the Ignis, Kento Dueling against Haru, and finally Yusaku Dueling Bohman. The most surprising thing was how Bohman claimed to be the real Yusaku while Yusaku himself was a copy. However, Yusaku disproved Bohman by confirming the discrepancy in his story after asking him one crucial question.

"You asked him who kidnapped you and he answered Dr. Kogami. That's how you're convinced that Bohman's story is false?" Kento repeats what Yusaku told them, still a bit confused how does that proved it.

"Dr. Kogami might have been the true preparator of the Lost Incident, but do you think that he is the one personally kidnapped all the seven children? I doubt so." Yusaku explains, pointing out that one fact.

Kento and the others understand now. The point of the question was who exactly brought them to the place of the incident, not the one behind the incident. Dr. Kogami had assistants with him when he enacted the Hanoi Project. It's possible that Dr. Kogami had his assistants capture the children in his place. But Bohman only named Dr. Kogami and didn't divulge any further details, which means that he couldn't have been Yusaku's copy let alone the real one.

"Come to think of it, though I can't remember well, the one who kidnapped me has lighter skin than Dr. Kogami." Takeru doesn't remember the face of the person who snatched him away, but he is

sure that person was not Dr. Kogami from the color of his skin. He had seen the photo of Dr. Kogami from the one shown by Flame, and he was sure of it.

"What about you, Kento? Do you remember anything?" Ai asks Kento, the latter being a victim as well.

Kento goes silent. He tries to remember. That day, ten years ago, he remembered running out of the house and taking a walk around the street. The street was damp after the rain. Though the rain had stopped, the sky was still covered by clouds, blocking the sunlight. He was walking while crying because he missed his parents. He sniffled and wiped his tears many times with his sleeve. He was so absorbed in his sadness that he didn't see someone was in front of him. He bumped into that person and fell on his butt. The person he bumped into quickly turned to him when he felt the bump and heard Kento's cry.

However, after that, Kento can't remember anything. Everything turned blank the moment Kento tried to recall that person's face. The psychiatrist that Kento talked to before told him that it was some sort of defensive mechanism. His mind blocked out certain memories due to his trauma. Though Kento has decided to face his past, a part of him is not yet ready to fully remember what happened.

"Sorry… I can't remember yet…" Kento says dejectedly.

"No need to push yourself. We all know it's not a pleasant memory." Kusanagi kindly tells Kento.

"Listening to your story, this means that Bohman knows about Fujiki-kun's past." Kazue stirs back the conversation to the main point. "He must've investigated Fujiki-kun somehow."

"And in detail." Takeru adds.

"We also must be prepared for the possibility that he had investigated all of you. He may have known your real identities all

along." Flame says. If their enemies had thoroughly investigated Yusaku to the extent of knowing about him being the victim of the Lost Incident, it's likely that they had also investigated Takeru and Kento.

"That's concerning…" Kento would hate to think that their enemies right now are watching them from somewhere.

"But he's our only lead to retrieve Kusanagi-san's brother's consciousness." Yusaku reminds. Whoever Bohman and Haru are, the fact they had stolen Jin's data remains unchanged. They must find them.

"But the gate has vanished. For now, we have to wait for it to reappear." Kusanagi is frustrated, but there's nothing they can do but wait.

"Sorry, Kusanagi-san." Yusaku apologizes. His shoulders slump down. His expression looks neutral at first glance, but if you look closer, you'll see the self-disappointment and guilt in his emerald-colored gaze. "I couldn't find a lead."

"Don't sweat it. I'm just glad you came home safe." Kusanagi places his hand on Yusaku's shoulder to assure his partner. While it's upsetting that Bohman got away again, Kusanagi is not angry at Yusaku in the slightest.

"Because I still need you guys!" Kusanagi then points to the Ignis algorithm on screen that he got when investigating SOL Technologies' restricted area. "Look at that. By analyzing the data we acquired near the gate, we might learn something."

"Better than doing nothing. Let's try it." Yusaku begins to analyze the Ignis algorithm.

"Wait, you're doing it right now?" Takeru looks at Yusaku worriedly.

"I'll just try to analyze it for a bit." Yusaku replies without moving his eyes from the screen.

"I'll help too." Kento joins in, also assisting Yusaku in analyzing the algorithm.

"Ai, Flame, you are Ignis, can't you solve this data?" Kusanagi asks the two said Ignis.

"We're using the same algorithm, but in the end, each of us has our own quirks in writing the algorithm." Flame reveals. Just like any programmer working on their data, Ignis have their own distinct individual style. It shows from how things are tested, how a design is split up, how things are named and a lot of other details which are decided by each Ignis.

"Windy's coding habit has nutty scope of variables and long. Even for us, it won't be a walk in the park to crack it. All of us will have to work our brains together." Ai begrudgingly admits.

Behind them, Kazue is watching her male companions concernedly. It hasn't been that long since they logged out from Windy's World and they're already working again. Yusaku, especially, is working the hardest of the bunch. No matter how many times Kusanagi tries to assure him, Yusaku's sense of responsibility won't allow him to take a rest just yet if it means getting a clue to find Bohman, and eventually Jin. And Kazue also notices that Kento seems to have something on his mind. Judging from what she saw during the confrontation between him against Blue Girl and Ghost Girl, it wasn't difficult to figure it out.

She understands the need to find Jin as soon as they can, but they can't keep going like this. They're pushing themselves too hard. They need to rest even if it's for just one day. But there's no way they'll listen to her if she just tells them to take a break. She must come up with a plausible excuse to get them to rest somehow without rousing suspicion…

A light bulb then switches on in her head.

She quietly goes out from the truck, turning on her mobile phone to make a call, pressing her father's phone number.

"Hello, Father? I have a request about one of our projects…"

Cafe Nagi - Central Plaza - Den City - Next Day

"You want us to help you test Hibiki Enterprise's new project" Yusaku asks his senior, who is smiling at him, Kusanagi, and Takeru. Her palms pressed to each other in a requesting gesture.

"Yes. The people we originally requested for help can't come because of a clash in their schedules, so my father is looking for new people to help." Kazue explains. That was a lie, of course. The people whom her father originally requested for help have their schedule delayed to another date at her request.

"But why us? I thought Kento is helping you too." Takeru asks, briefly glancing at Kento.

"This project is partly aimed for Dueling, so we'd like to know the opinion from several Duelists, not just one." Kento adds. Last night, he was surprised when Kazue suddenly came up with the idea and told him. At first, he thought it wasn't necessary to go this far, but when Kazue brought up Yusaku, Kento couldn't decline.

"And to be honest, other than Kento, you are the only ones I can trust with this. Other people would have an ulterior motive. Please? Just for one day is enough." Kazue looks at them pleadingly, doing her best to show her sparkling face that has melted the heart of many people.

Her attempt is not in vain.

"Yusaku, why don't we just go for it? It's just one day." Ai asks Yusaku. It sounds fun, and it's hard to refuse seeing Kazue beg like that.

"Hibiki Enterprise must have high-quality programs written for their server. If we go, we can learn a thing or two to improve our skill." Flame agrees to the idea for a different reason.

"Flame, we can't just peek at confidential information of Senpai's company like that." Takeru scolds his partner. Does he not consider himself being rude for saying his intention so blatantly right in front of Kazue herself?

"I don't mind at all. As I said, I trust you. You won't misuse what you learn for something malicious. If you like, we'll provide new equipment for this truck as payment for helping us." Kazue proposes. Other than giving them a much deserves break, her father is also planning to pay them for their help. It's only fair for an employer to give payment to their employees for their work.

That proposal surprised everyone, especially Kusanagi. True, the equipment that he has in his truck and back at home is not high quality compared to the equipment that Kazue has. The income from his hotdog truck and his parents' work together are not high enough to buy first-rate equipment. Having equipment of the same quality as the ones belonged to a big company like Hibiki Enterprise would undoubtedly be helpful for their work. However, getting that equipment as payment for whatever work Kazue has for them is too big of a payment.

"Kazue-chan, I appreciate your intention, but-" Kusanagi is about to refuse until Kento leans closer to him, enough to whisper to his ear.

"Kusanagi-san, read the room here. Yusaku-kun is still bothered by what happened yesterday with Bohman. It won't be good for his mental health if he keeps beating himself up like this." Kento whispers so that the others won't be able to hear them. Of course,

it's actually not just Yusaku, he and Kazue also want to cheer up Kusanagi, but they won't tell him that.

Kusanagi pauses at that. It's just as Kento said. Yusaku did look down yesterday. Yusaku always has a big sense of responsibility. He already failed to catch Bohman the first time, and yesterday he failed for the second time. Kusanagi thought he did well in hiding his insecurity for his inability in finding Jin. That's not even possible to begin with. Because Yusaku already knew how much Kusanagi loves his brother. His attempt to look normal may have inadvertently put pressure on Yusaku to work harder to find Jin. Yusaku isn't just helping in finding Jin. He's also the one doing all the fighting. Yusaku does a lot more work than Kusanagi.

He doesn't want Yusaku to overwork, burdening himself for his sake. No matter how much he wants to save Jin, Kusanagi can't bear it if it takes a toll on Yusaku's condition. If this can help to momentarily distract Yusaku and put his mind more at ease, that'll be more than enough payment to do whatever work Kazue is going to give them.

"I think it's a good idea. We could only get second-hand equipment within our budget, so having new equipment to replace it would be good for our work henceforth. Let's give it a try, Yusaku, Takeru." Kusanagi quickly retracts his intended refusal and accepts Kazue's proposal. He tries to look as excited as possible at the prospect of getting new equipment to convince Yusaku.

And it works.

"Alright, since you said so, Kusanagi-san." Yusaku finally relents. Kusanagi does have a point, so there's no reason to refuse a good deal.

Kazue, Kento, and Kusanagi beams bright at Yusaku's answer. They exchange thumbs up and smiles of victory in their minds.

"Gather here the day after tomorrow. I'll have someone to pick you up." Kazue says before going out to call her father again, confirming

that her friends will help them.

Hibiki Research Facility - Outskirt of Den City - Two Days Later

When they were told that the research facility is on the outskirts of the city, they imagined it would be a small building that doesn't stand out among the other rural buildings or houses around it. True to their expectations, at first glance, the building is no different from any ordinary house. The house is all concrete and has tall glass windows that give a view of the neighborhood.

That is how it appears on the outside.

The door is equipped with a retinal scanner. When they open the door, they are greeted by a security guard. Each of them is required to undergo a series of rigorous security checks. The moment they pass through the living room after the security has deemed them clean, they are welcomed by a completely different view. Opposite its humble exterior, the inside is filled with high-technological equipment. And there's an underground laboratory and testing grounds where they test out the prototype products. To make it even better, the facility is self-sufficient, housing its own: ventilation, cold and hot water, central heating, sanitation, drainage, and power generation systems.

"You really can't judge a book by its cover…" Takeru says in amazement.

"I thought this is something that we can only see in movies!" Ai is trying his best to refrain from coming out from his Duel Disk due to his restrained excitement.

"I'll show you around after we're done. We're going to the testing room." Kazue says as she escorts them to the underground.

"Is it necessary to make the testing room underground?" Takeru asks as they descend the stairs.

"It's a precaution to prevent outsiders from peeking and to not bother our neighbors. We also made it soundproof to avoid bothering our neighbors with loud noises from our experiments." Kazue explains. When this facility was first opened, they conducted various experiments with their machines that caused loud noises to the point the whole block heard it. They received complaints from the other residents. They learned their lessons and built an underground laboratory and rooms with soundproof walls to prevent noises reaching outside.

"Here we are." Kazue stops in front of a door that she opens with a keycard. She already reserved the whole room just for her and her friends, so no one can enter without her permission and no one can watch what they're doing. This will ensure Kento, Yusaku, and Takeru's identities as Holysaber, Playmaker, and Soulburner hidden.

The room has nothing but a single bench, and at the ceiling there's a huge round machine. There's another separate small room on the other side. From the window, they see machines and equipment inside the small room.

"I'll go inside that room, all of you stay here for a minute."

Kazue runs into the small room across from them. Kento and the others don't know what she's doing, only able to see her standing in front of the device and moving her hands. Based on her position and movement, they assume that she's fiddling with the device inside.

"Ahem. Testing. Can you all hear me?" Kazue asks through the speaker while looking at them through the window. When Kento and the others replied with a thumb up, "Okay, prepare your Duel Disks and your card."

[DUEL DISK DETECTED]

[REAL SOLID VISION ACTIVATED]

The round machine above them starts to make noises and emits reddish white light throughout the whole room. The light then disperses into tiny particles.

"What's this? What's going on?" Ai looks around at the particles around them.

"I don't feel or see anything changes." Flame comments while looking at their surroundings. Save for these particles, there's nothing specific that changes from normal.

"Now, Kento, try to summon one of your monsters with your Duel Disk now." Kazue instructs her childhood friend.

Kento exchanges confused glances with Yusaku and the others. Kento did agree with Kazue's suggestion, but he himself doesn't know what kind of test they're doing. She insisted on keeping it a secret because she wanted to surprise them all, including him. They're not Dueling right now, and she wants him to summon a monster?

"Just do it and you'll know." Kazue tells them with firmer tone.

Kento blinks in confusion but does as he was instructed. He picks Saint Kuriboh to summon. Without a word, he places Saint Kuriboh on his Main Monster Zone like he does whenever he's Dueling. Suddenly, the red particles glow and disappear as Saint Kuriboh is summoned. Saint Kuriboh looks blinks, looking at itself with gaze of curiosity. When it touches its own fur with its hands, its eyes widened as if it feels something unbelievable. It turns to Kento with its eyes lit up. Saint Kuriboh flies ecstatically towards Kento.

Kento stays silent on the spot, expecting for Saint Kuriboh to pass through him since it's only a hologram, and thus, cannot be touched. That's what everyone thought until…

"Kuri!" Saint Kuriboh latches itself to Kento, hugging him tightly.

"Huh…?" Kento blinks many times while looking at Saint Kuriboh that's still latching on to him. Slowly, carefully, his hands reach for Saint Kuriboh's fur. Upon contact, he begins to caress his ace monster, moving his hand up and down its fur many times to make sure if what his hands are feeling is real. And it is, "W-wow! It's real! I can touch Saint Kuriboh!"

"Kuri! Kuri!" Saint Kuriboh hugs its master tighter.

The other occupants of the room who are watching all gasps when Kento finally said the words that's stuck in their mouths.

"For real?! Like, seriously?!" Takeru finally let out after a struggle to form words. He points at Saint Kuriboh in disbelief.

"No way!" Kusanagi can't take his eyes off Kento and Saint Kuriboh, and so did everyone else.

"Saint Kuriboh! Oh, you're so soft!" Kento pulls Saint Kuriboh into his embrace, enjoying his ace monster's soft fur.

"Kuri~" Saint Kuriboh happily returns its master's embrace.

Unable to contain his curiosity anymore, Yusaku walks to Kento and Saint Kuriboh, hardly hesitating in touching the little monster.

"He's right… I can touch Saint Kuriboh…" Yusaku's voice may sound flat, but listening carefully, there's awe in his tone.

"Amazing… ! How did you do it?!" Ai asks with a curious yell.

"Real Solid Vision." Kazue tells them, still working on the device inside and speaking through the speaker, "It's a technology that materialize the holographic projection by creating an artificial virtual dimension in the real world and then making mass particles stored within it compatible with Solid Vision, drawing them out and materialize them."

"That kind of thing is possible?" Takeru says while still petting Saint Kuriboh who enjoys his touch, still having a hard time believing this is real.

"This is still a work in progress, so we're not sure how far we can go with this materialization. That's why we'd like you to try it. You are the first people to get to experience interacting directly with your monsters in real life." Kazue smiles victoriously. Her plan to surprise them is a big success. But this is not the end of it.

"Now that we've concluded the first test, I'd like you to do a demonstration through Duel." Kazue comes out from the room for a moment. Her victorious smile is replaced with a cheeky smile. "I have an idea to make this more interesting."

In hope of making the Duel more exciting as Kazue put it, she proposed for them to switch each other's Deck and Duel using them. She'd like to see how well they adapt as Duelists when using Decks that are not their own. In Ai and Flame's case, they will partner up with whoever got their partner's respective Decks. The switch is decided through reaping. And the result of the reaping for the first demonstration is…

"Don't worry, Yusaku. With a brilliant A.I. like me, our victory is guaranteed." Flame proudly tells Yusaku, pounding his chest with confidence at his temporary partner.

"I'll be in your care, Flame." Yusaku never expected he'll team up with Flame like this. It never crossed his mind to try out other Decks either. Though he has no intention to do the same in real battle, he has to admit that this arrangement stirs his fervor.

On the other side of the field, Kento is standing facing Yusaku, wearing the latter's Duel Disk.

"Let's kick their butt, Kento!" Ai encourages his temporary partner.

"You're okay going against your own partner?" Kento asks with a sweat dropped at Ai's eagerness.

"This is this! That is that!", is Ai's only response.

Kento looks at Yusaku. From his gestures and expressions, he's loosening up. That's a good sign. Not just Yusaku, Takeru and Kusanagi also have their eyes on them with anticipation. Kazue's plan to get them to have fun seems to be going well. Inciting their interest with Real Solid Vision and then stir their newfound interest into excitement through Duel demonstration. Now, it's up to him to liven things up. Just for this one day, they'll forget about chasing after Bohman. They'll do their best to relax and enjoy their break with nothing at stake.

"Duel!"

Kento Hijiri LP: 4000

Yusaku Fujiki LP: 4000

Kento reads the cards in his hand. Though he had seen Yusaku Dueled as Playmaker, there are cards that he hasn't seen him using yet. And to be sure that he remembers it right, Kento reads the cards again. This is Yusaku's own Deck, so Yusaku knows fully its capabilities. Even if he's using Takeru's Salamangreat Deck, as long as he understands how his Deck works like the back of his hand, Yusaku can form a counter strategy.

"Don't be pessimistic, Kento! You have me here! I can tell you everything about this Deck!" Ai says boastfully, pounding his chest to emphasize his pride.

"Is there a way to surprise Yusaku-kun? This is my first time using his Deck, so even if he doesn't underestimate me, he'd still think that I'm new with Dueling the way he does." Kento asks.

"Of course, there is! No matter how much he knows all the cards in this Deck, you can still surprise him if you use a strategy that he never thought of!" Ai pulls Kento to him, whispering the said plan into his ear. Kento blinks as he looks at Ai who is confident.

"You're Yusaku-kun's partner, so there's no harm trying that." Kento agrees to try out Ai's idea. And he himself also likes that idea.

"I'm taking the first turn. Since I control no monster, I can Special Summon Linkslayer from my hand." Kento summons Linkslayer to the Main Monster Zone in Attack Position.

Linkslayer (CYBERSE/EARTH/EFFECT/ATK: 2000/DEF: 600/LV: 5)

"And then I Summon Storm Cipher." Kento Normal Summons Storm Cipher to the zone next to Linkslayer in Attack Position.

Storm Cipher (CYBERSE/DARK/EFFECT/ATK: 2400/DEF: 0/LV: 4)

"As a Cyberse monster was Normal Summoned to my field, I can Special Summon Boot Staggered from my hand." Kento Special Summons Boot Staggered via its own effect to the zone next to Storm Cipher in Attack Position.

Boot Staggered (CYBERSE/LIGHT/EFFECT/ATK: 2300/DEF: 500/LV: 5)

"I set a card and end my turn." Kento concluded his turn.

Yusaku wonders why Kento didn't perform Link Summon. With those monsters on the field, he could've summoned Decode Talker or other Link Monsters. Ai is also with him. Ai may not be the sharpest tool in the shed, but they've been fighting together long enough for Ai to understand his Deck and how to use it. Are they planning something? Waiting to see how he's going to use Takeru's Salamangreat Deck?

"Yusaku, you've seen Takeru Duels, but should I explain to you about this Deck?" Flame asks his temporary partner.

"No. I appreciate you're trying to help but let me try this out by myself. I want to know how much I can do on my own first." Yusaku politely declines Flame's offer. As a Duelist, he himself is curious to test how he can adjust himself with using Salamangreat Deck.

"I'll ask for your assistance when I need it. I'll be counting on you when that happen." Yusaku smiles at Flame.

"Rest assured. I'll give you, my guidance like I did to Takeru." Flame promises.

"My turn. I activate Salamangreat Meer's effect from my hand. By sending a Salamangreat Monster from my hand to the Graveyard, I can Special Summon it." Yusaku sends Salamangreat Falco and then Special Summons Meer in Attack Position to the Main Monster Zone

Salamangreat Meer (CYBERSE/FIRE/EFFECT/ATK: 800/DEF: 600/LV: 2)

"I activate Falco's effect in the Graveyard. By returning a Salamangreat monster I control the Graveyard, I can Special Summon Falco." Yusaku returns Meer, summoning Falco in its place.

Salamangreat Falco (CYBERSE/FIRE/EFFECT/ATK: 1200/DEF: 1600/LV: 4)

"As Meer was added to my hand other than my normal draw, I can Special Summon it." Yusaku summons Meer again via its own effect to the zone next to Falco.

"And then I Normal Summon Salamangreat Jack Jaguar." Yusaku summons Jack Jaguar in Attack Position next to Meer in the Main Monster Zone.

Salamangreat Jack Jaguar (CYBERSE/FIRE/EFFECT/ATK: 1800/DEF: 1200/LV: 4)

"Appear, the circuit that guides the future!" Yusaku summons the Link Portal, setting Meer, Falco, and Jack Jaguar to the Link Markers.

"Link Summon! Appear, Link 3, Salamangreat Heatleo!" Yusaku summons Takeru's ace monster to the Extra Monster Zone in Attack Position.

Salamangreat Heatleo (ATK: 2300/LNK: 3/LM: Bottom-left, Top, Bottom-right)

"Oh! Yusaku summoned Heatleo so quickly!" Takeru exclaimed in amazement. It feels quite strange to see someone else other than him using his deck and summoning his ace monster. But seeing that it's Yusaku who is them, Takeru also feels honored.

"And he even summoned it through the same procedure as you did before." Kusanagi comments, also impressed for Yusaku able to grasp the essence of Takeru's Deck so quickly.

"I activate Heatleo's effect! When it was Link Summoned, I can shuffle a card in my opponent's Spell & Trap Zone into the Deck! Resounding Roar!" Yusaku declares, urging Heatleo to roar, unleashing sound wave that blows away Kento's Set card back to the Deck.

"And since Heatleo was Link Summoned, I can activate Jack Jaguar's effect in my Graveyard." Yusaku shuffles Falco and Special Summons Jack Jaguar to the zone the bottom-left Link Arrow of Heatleo points to.

"Battle! I attack Linkslayer with Salamangreat Heatleo!" Yusaku declares Battle Phase.

Heatleo whirls its body while enveloped in its own flame, forming a blazing tornado that explodes at the moment of contact, destroying Linkslayer. The impact of the explosion causes the whole room to shake and pushes back not only Kento who controls Linkslayer, but also Kusanagi and Takeru who are spectating.

Kento Hijiri LP: 4000 = 3700

"I set a card and end my turn." Yusaku concludes before turning to Kusanagi and Takeru. "Kusanagi-san, Takeru, are you okay?!"

"Y-yeah! We're just surprised!" Takeru responds, still taken aback by the blow from the explosion.

"For a second I thought I was going to be blown up." Kusanagi states while holding his chest. His heart is pounding from experiencing directly with his own body the impact of a monster's attack.

"Kento, are you okay?!" Yusaku shouts at Kento who is quiet.

"I'm good! Just give me a second!" Kento replies. He said that, but his hands are trembling from the blow. It feels surreal. What he thought he could only feel in LINK VRAINS, now he experienced it in real life.

"Kento, are you sure you're okay?" Ai asks concernedly.

"Hahaha… Sorry for worrying you. I'm really fine. I'm just still getting used to this. It's almost like a dream to Duel with this much realism, you know." Kento assures Ai.

"I'm sure Yusaku feels the same. He has that stone face, but inside, he is as shocked as you are." Ai says confidently. There are times he still can't fully tell what Yusaku is thinking, but Ai can tell that right now Yusaku shares the same sentiment as them. Only that he's better at hiding it.

"Come on! It's time to continue our plan!" Ai encourages Kento.

"Here we go!" Kento stands straight again, continuing the Duel.

"My turn! I summon Dotscaper from my hand!" Kento summons Dotscaper in Attack Position to the Main Monster Zone.

Dotscaper (CYBERSE/EARTH/EFFECT/ATK: 0/DEF: 2100/LV: 1)

"Appear! The circuit that lights up the future!" Kento Sets Dotscaper to the Bottom-Link Marker of the Link Portal.

"Link Summon! Appear, Link 1, Linkuriboh!" Kento summons Linkuriboh in Attack Position to the Main Monster Zone.

Linkuriboh (CYBERSE/DARK/LINK/ATK: 300/LM: Bottom/LNK: 1)

"When Dotscaper is sent to the Graveyard, I can Special Summon it!" Kento revives Doscaper in Attack Position.

"Appear again, the circuit that lights up the future!" Kento Sets Storm Cipher, Boot Staggered, Linkuriboh, and Dotscaper to the Link Markers, combining the circuit.

"Link Summon! Appear, Link 4, Firewall Dragon!" Kento summons Firewall Dragon to the Extra Monster Zone in Attack Position.

Firewall Dragon (CYBERSE/LINK/LIGHT/ATK: 2500/LNK: 4/LM: Left, Top-Center, Right, Bottom-Center)

"Kento is summoning Firewall Dragon already?!" Takeru thought that it'd take time until Kento could summon Firewall Dragon. But he already did it in his second turn.

"If he can use Firewall Dragon's effect, then Kento can inflict huge damage to Yusaku." Kusanagi has a hard time predicting how this Duel will go.

Kento is ready to enact the plan that Ai came up with.

However…

[TIME LIMIT REACHED]

"What?" Kento looks up at the sudden announcement. Everyone else is also looking around them following that announcement.

The particles that materialize the cards start fading away.

[SOLID VISION TERMINATED]

All of the monsters on both sides disintegrated, ending the Duel so abruptly.

"They disappeared! Why?!" Ai looks around in confusion.

"Looks like this prototype Real Solid Vision can only work for a limited time." Kazue notes down in her report about the error. They had similar problems before, so the sudden deactivation didn't surprise her much. She's still glad because unlike before, Real Solid Vision has been working for a longer time and not just several seconds.

"I'm sorry. We'll have to cancel the Duel. I must report this to the staff." Kazue comes out from the room with her report in hand. She turns to her childhood friend, "Kento, take everyone to the park. I'll bring our lunch there after I hand over the report."

Kazue leaves the room in haste, leaving Kento and the others by themselves. Kento already knows the crook and nook of this place, that's why she's not worried about leaving them because Kento can guide their friends safely in her place without getting lost. It's a pity that they can't enjoy themselves with Real Solid Vision for long, so she'd make sure they'll have a splendid meal for their lunch.

"What a letdown! Just when Kento and I were going to use our trump card!" Ai pouts.

"Nothing will change. Whatever card you have, Yusaku and I would deal with it without breaking a sweat." Flame retorts smugly.

"Oh yeah? Let's continue once they finished the Real Solid Vision!" Ai challenges the Fire Ignis.

Kento claps his hands together now that everything is settled.

"It's lunchtime. Let's go to the park. Kazue will meet up with us there."

Park - Hibiki Research Facility - Outskirt of Den City

After seeing the inside of the facility, Yusaku and the others thought there's nothing else that will surprise them. They are quickly proven wrong when Kento takes them to the park at the back of the facility where they're going to have their lunch.

What they expected to be a small but beautiful garden turns out to be a spacious park that almost as wide as a public park found in the city, decorated with three kinds of trees, which consisted of Ginkgo biloba, Japanese cherry, and camphor tree. The benches and tables are fashioned from a wind-felled tree, the legs being sections of the trunk still clothed in bark and the top was a fine long plank rendered a deep soulful brown by the varnish. There are cats, dogs, birds, and even bunnies freely roaming around, and a few robots tending to the park.

While Yusaku and the others are still enjoying the scenery, Kento spreads the tablecloth at one of the tables. One would think that they're having a picnic. This isn't the first time he has been to this facility, so he's hardly surprised by anything. Still, watching his friends react the same way as he did is an amusing sight. Yusaku is surrounded by cats and bunnies who are closing on his Duel Disk, curious of Ai who is shooing them away to no avail. Takeru is petting one of dogs that leans close to his leg with Flame trying to give it a command to sit down, only to be met with a disobedient bark that forces Flame to retreat into Takeru's Duel Disk. Kusanagi is feeding

the birds with breadcrumbs that are provided in the park. Kento wishes he can capture this scenery in a picture.

A few minutes after their arrival, Kazue comes in with a basket of lunch for them, prompting them to sit on their prepared benches as Kazue places their foods one by one. There are Ajitsuke tamago, karaage onigirazu, soboro onigirazu, tuna onigirazu, miso soup, and fruits. She also carries a water flask filled with matcha tea.

"Dig in, everybody. Don't hold back. There's still a lot more if you want seconds." Kazue tells her friends who are eyeing the lunch she brought for them.

Everyone, minus Ai and Flame who doesn't eat, starts to enjoy their lunch.

"This place is amazing, Hibiki-senpai. You have many facilities like this?" Takeru asks. His curiosity grows for each second since they arrived here, so he couldn't help himself to ask.

"We have around five more facilities like this. Each one develops different projects." Kazue answers while serving tea for each of them. "By the way, aside from the bug from earlier, can you tell me what you think about our Real Solid Vision?"

"I think in terms of giving the mass to cards, you already implemented them enough. When we touched them, it's like touching a real thing." Takeru didn't Duel, but when he touched Saint Kuriboh and when he felt the blowing force of the wind when Battle Phase occurred, Takeru felt he was experiencing a real battlefield. Though he was only watching, he was exhilarated by the sheer reality the monsters formed through their exchanges.

"But that materialization also concerns me. Because the monsters take physical form, their attacks will also physically affect us. We may get hurt from the monsters' attack." Yusaku felt the impact directly on his body from the Duel earlier. When Kento retaliated, Yusaku's body reflexively moved away from the attack. He

instinctively knew that he might get hurt had he taken the attack head on. If they summon a monster with huge size or sharp weapons, they'd get injured even worse. Kento, being Yusaku's opponent in that Duel, also agreed with his point.

"How about adding a damage setting? By adjusting the damage of the Solid Vision, you won't need to worry for the players to suffer severe injuries." Kusanagi suggests. Since they are aiming for a realistic approach, rather than removing the damage altogether, they can set the damage to properly adjust with the situation and condition.

"That's a good idea. I'll keep a note for that." Kazue writes down her friends' opinions in her notebook. Though inviting them here was supposed to be an excuse to get them to take a break, everyone provides important input to improve the Real Solid Vision that she can't miss. They're still enjoying themselves, so it's mutually beneficial for them.

"Hey! Hey! Do you think you can set that Real Solid Vision to my Duel Disk? I can get myself materialized at anytime and anywhere I want with it!" Ai asks excitedly, already imagining himself gain physical body in the real world that'll allow him to do many things that he can't do by himself. He usually must ask Roboppi to do it in his place.

"That's a good idea. For once, we're on the same page." Flame agrees with the Dark Ignis.

"We can, but as you've seen, since it's still incomplete, you can only materialize for a limited time. Are you okay with that?" Kazue asks. She already planned to install the Real Solid Vision program in all their Duel Disks, but her plan was to wait until the program was perfected to allow them to use Real Solid Vision for an indefinite amount of time. Installing that program now while it's still in the early stage doesn't sit well with her.

"It's fine! We can just install the final product again later after you finished it." Ai doesn't look mind with only being materialized for a limited time.

"That's not for you to decide. Don't you have any shame asking for that?" Yusaku reprimands Ai. They already troubled Kazue who had prepared so much for them today. "Senpai, you don't need to listen to their whims."

"I don't really mind. I do plan to install Real Solid Vision to you once it's completed." Kazue reveals. She was planning for it to be a surprise, but a bit too bad Ai brought it up first. "But if you still insist wanting to install this prototype, I'll install it later for you."

"You shouldn't spoil them, Senpai." Yusaku feels bad for receiving this technology without paying anything, even if it's still in the prototype stage.

"Oh, it won't be for free, of course. I'll have you fulfill two requests." Kazue raises her two fingers, "First, I want you to update us if you notice something about this prototype. Second, I ask that you're not disclose this to outsiders except everyone here."

"Roger! Hehehehe… if the other Ignis knows, they'd be jealous." Ai snickers, imagining how the other Ignis would react.

"Maybe Windy and Divine Ignis will, but I don't think Earth Ignis, Water Ignis, and Light Ignis will." Flame comments.

Speaking of which…

"Say, what's Divine Ignis' name?" Kento asks. All this time, they never refer to the other Ignis with proper names. "There's Ai, Flame, and then Windy. What about Divine Ignis?"

"Our real names in Ignis language are too difficult for humans to pronounce, so we came up with alternative names that would be easier for humans to understand." Flame explains. That's why he

already came up with his own name before meeting Takeru to make it easier for his partner.

"So, Ai and Flame are names for you to use among humans?" Kazue asks to make sure she understands it right.

"That's right! I got mine from Yusaku!" Ai confirms.

"As for me, I came up with my own name. Unlike a cutesy name like his, mine is cool, isn't it?" Flame says boastfully. Had he had a nose, it would've grown longer due to his pride.

"It's cute because I am cute!" Ai argues. This is already like the third time Flame has made fun of his name. Whatever the reason behind his naming, he loves the name given by his partner. Though he does have a reservation of the simple meaning for his name.

"I don't see anything wrong with the name 'Ai'. Honestly, I like Ai better." Kento tactlessly shares his opnion. Flame's name is by no means inferior or the sort, but if he has to pick between the two, he personally prefers Ai's name.

That comment surprises the two Ignis.

"Really?!" Ai looks at Kento expectantly, hoping he didn't hear it wrong.

"What?! Why?!" Flame asks incredulously.

"Of course, I think Flame is a good name. A cool one too. But, if it's written in kanji, 'Ai' means 'love', right? It's a kind and friendly-sounding name. It described Ai himself. Don't you think so?" Kento smiles down gently at Ai. Everything he said is genuine, coming from his heart. Everyone present can tell that he's completely wearing his heart on his sleeve now.

"Kento…" Ai is deeply touched that few tears leak out. He never thought that his name could be interpreted that way as opposed to

how he was at first only named so because he is an A.I.

"I'll admit it's a good name when you put it that way, but saying that Ai is kind? He's not a bad guy, but that's too much of a compliment. You don't seriously think he is kind, right?" Flame raises an eyebrow, looking at Kento like the Olympios Stratos user has grown another head inside.

"You're just jealous because Kento likes me more than you." This time, Ai is the one who raises his head and chest boastfully.

"He only said that he likes your name better. That doesn't mean he likes you more than me." Flame argues back, emphasizing the name part, refusing to back down.

"A-anyway, what's Divine Ignis' name?" Kento quickly intrudes before they can argue off the topic they're supposed to be having. He wants to avoid the argument escalating into the two Ignis asking him which one between them that he likes better.

"We only came up with our names recently after leaving Cyberse World, so we don't know. Maybe Divine Ignis came up with his own name already or not at all." Ai finally answers.

"Usually, at this moment, you're going to come up with a name for him." Flame states. He expected Ai to come up with names for their Ignis friends on his own whether they like it or not when Kento asked.

"Nah. He won't like it if I decide his name for him. I won't give him a name without his approval." Ai shakes his head. If it's the other Ignis, he'd do so if they don't have names yet. But since Divine Ignis is his best buddy, he'll refrain himself and wait until they meet again to decide his name.

"That's strange coming from you. Knowing you, you'll give a name to anybody as you like it." Flame knows how selfish and careless Ai is,

and even with his friendship with Divine Ignis, he thought Ai would still name the said Ignis regardless of how the other guy feels.

"Even I know when to be considerate!" Ai is hurt that Flame thinks that way about him.

"A wise decision. Who knows what kind of weird name you'll come up with if we leave it to you." Flame doesn't want to imagine what kind of name Ai will suggest for him had he not come up with it first. Fortunately, he knows when and how to pick his own name.

"Just what do you take me for?! The names I came up with are simple!"

"You're always very simplistic."

"There's a beauty in simplicity!"

Despite Kento's attempt to end the argument, it was a pointless effort in the end with Ai and Flame bickering back and forth with neither willing to relent. Kento deems it best to just leave them be and continue enjoying his lunch with the rest.

"Better just ignore them when they're like that, Kento." Yusaku advice the Olympios Stratos user who is glancing at Ai and Flame once in a while.

"I don't mind at all. They look like they're having fun." Kento replies. The bickering between Ai and Flame is nothing serious. If anything, that bickering is an expression of their friendship.

"You think so?"

"You don't look you hate it either, Yusaku-kun." Kento remarks. Though Yusaku said it like it's an annoyance, Yusaku's relaxed gaze is evident proof that Yusaku is relieved to see Ai and Flame getting along so well.

"It's getting noisier ever since Flame joined in." Yusaku retorts, trying not to look like he cares. His effort, unfortunately, is meaningless thanks to his hacker partner's interference.

"Don't mind him. Sometimes, it's difficult for Yusaku to be honest. He's still work in progress." Kusanagi intrudes between them, snickering as he did so.

"K-Kusanagi-san… !" Yusaku turns to Kusanagi. Unlike his usual cool and calm demeanor, there's nervousness in his tone and his ears turn slightly red.

"Yes. I can see that." Kento quickly catches on to Kusanagi's intention and plays along. Not just him, Takeru and Kazue also did too.

"He is what you usually called a 'tsundere', right?" Takeru adds. It hasn't been that long since he got to know Yusaku, but Takeru can tell from his observation that Yusaku is the type that is difficult in expressing how he really feels, particularly happiness.

"My, how unexpectedly cute of you, Fujiki-kun." Kazue giggles seeing Yusaku who is trying his best to compose himself from the onslaught of their comments.

"Cut it out, everyone…" Yusaku can't handle their stares and looks away in embarrassment.

"What's this? Yusaku-chan is being a coy~? Come on, be honest with us~" Ai doesn't miss the fun, quick to notice the redness in Yusaku's ears. He's all forgotten his bickering with Flame in favor of using this chance to tease his partner.

"Shut up." Yusaku quickly returns to his so-called robotic face to silence his Ignis partner, earning him laughter from everybody else.

"It's been a while since I have had this much fun. The last time was when we went with Fumito to Hokkaido during our school break."

Kento says while rubbing his stomach from too much eating and laughing.

"Yes. That was fun." Kazue agrees.

"Fumito?" Takeru repeats the name in question.

Kento and Kazue stop whatever they're doing as they realized what they just said. Facing their friends' curious stare, there's no turning back now. And it's not really something to be kept a secret. Kento and Kazue are simply having a bit difficulty talking about him because they're still processing what happened to Fumito two months ago. But it would be awkward if they changed the subject so quickly at this moment. It might ruin the atmosphere.

And… Maybe talking about Fumito to their new friends will make them feel better…

"Fumito Tohdo. He's my best friend. We used to attend the same school before I moved to Den City." Kento brings out his wallet from his bag. He shows them a photo of him together with Kazue and a brown-haired young man with darker shade of green spikes and fair skin.

"He was the one who helped me to get back to Dueling again." Kento's mind drowns in memory lane as he recalls his time with his deceased best friend.

Tokyo Gakugei Koganei Junior High School - Tokyo - Two Years Ago

Back then, Kento was a quiet student. He was not particularly loved or hated since he went through school life in a withdrawn state, preferring to observe everything from afar, neither too close nor too far from his schoolmates. During afternoon breaks and such, other students would talk in the classroom or play in the courtyard, but

since Kento would always be in the backyard having a nap, he gave people the impression that he was a loner.

Kento never bothered trying to correct this impression. He didn't mind his solitude in school so long as nobody bullied him. He enjoyed being a step away from his surroundings. He thought that his school life would continue this way until he graduates.

During one of his routine naps during lunchbreak, he found a Duel Monster card on the ground while he was on his way to his usual napping spot. Not too far from where the card was, he saw three students. One standing and the other two sitting. The one who was standing had brown hair with a darker shade of green spikes. The other two who were sitting, one had messy brown hair and wore glasses, the other one had short black hair that reached past the neck.

Seeing them wearing Duel Disks and there were no other people beside them, Kento assumed that one of them most likely dropped this card. He picked up the card and then walked towards them.

"Excuse me. Did one of you dropped this card?" Kento asked one of the three students, the one who was standing. The other two are busy looking at the screen of the iPad that seemed to show a Duel.

The spiky haired boy looked at the card that Kento showed, and he gasped as he recognized the card.

"Oh! Right! That's my card!" The boy accepted the card held out by Kento. He blinked when he saw Kento's face. "You're Kento Hijiri, right? From class A."

Kento nodded, a bit surprised. He didn't expect someone from a different class to recognize him. Since he hardly talked with anyone at school, he wouldn't be surprised if the students from other class didn't even know him.

"I'm Fumito Tohdo. I'm from class B. Thanks for picking up my card." The student, Fumito, introduced himself while also expressing his gratitude.

"Agh! I failed again!"

Kento and Tohdo were startled when one of Fumito's two friends yelled with his hands pulling his hair.

"This Duel Puzzle is tough." The becspectacled boy ruffled his hair while lamenting his failure before turning to Fumito, "Fumito, can't you solve this?"

"You already saw me failed once just a few minutes ago." Fumito retorted, earning him a whining from his two friends.

Out of sheer curiosity, Kento looked at the Duel Puzzle shown on the screen. The player must win the Duel in this one turn with available cards.

The player's LP is at 1000. There is one Set card in the player's Spell & Trap Zone which is,

Fine (Trap Card) : Discard 2 cards.

There are five cards in the player's hand, which consisted of:

Naturia Rock (ROCK/EARTH/EFFECT/ATK: 1200/DEF: 1200/LV: 3) : Once per Chain, when a Trap Card is activated (Quick Effect): You can send the top card of your Deck to the GY; Special Summon this card from your hand.

Naturia Bamboo Shoot (PLANT/EARTH/EFFECT/ATK: 2000/DEF: 2000/LV: 5) : While you control this face-up card that was Advance Summoned by Releasing a Naturia monster, your opponent cannot activate Spell/Trap Cards.

Spore (WIND/PLANT/TUNER/ATK: 400/DEF: 800/LV: 1) : If this card is in your Graveyard, you can remove from play 1 other Plant-

Type monster from your Graveyard to Special Summon this card from your Graveyard, and if you do, increase its Level by the Level of that banished monster. You can only use this effect of Spore once per Duel.

Genex Ally Birdman (DARK/MACHINE/TUNER/ATK: 1400/DEF: 400/LV: 3) : You can return 1 face-up monster you control to the hand; Special Summon this card from your hand, but banish it when it leaves the field, also it gains 500 ATK if the returned monster was WIND on the field.

Supervise (Equip Spell) : Equip only to a Gemini monster. It becomes an Effect Monster and gains its effects. If this face-up card is sent from the field to the GY: Target 1 Normal Monster in your GY; Special Summon it.

Meanwhile, on the player's field, in the Monster Zone, there is only one monster,

Gigaplant (PLANT/EARTH/GEMINI/EFFECT/ATK: 2400/DEF: 1200/LV: 6) : This card is treated as a Normal Monster while face-up on the field or in the Graveyard. While this card is a Normal Monster on the field, you can Normal Summon it to have it become an Effect Monster with this effect: Once per turn, you can Special Summon 1 Insect or Plant monster from your hand or Graveyard.

And the extra Deck, there's one Synchro Monster,

Red Daemon's Dragon (DRAGON/DARK/SYNCHRO/ATK: 3000/DEF: 2000/LV: 8): After damage calculation, if this card attacked an opponent's Defense Position monster: Destroy all Defense Position monsters your opponent controls. Once per turn, during your End Phase: Destroy all other monsters you control that did not declare an attack this turn. This card must be face-up on the field to activate and to resolve this effect.

The opponent, on the other hand, has 5800 LP, has three Set cards and three monsters with the same name and all three in Defense

Position,

Marshmallon (FAIRY/LIGHT/EFFECT/ATK: 300/DEF: 500/LV: 3): Cannot be destroyed by battle. After damage calculation, if this card was attacked, and was face-down at the start of the Damage Step: The attacking player takes 1000 damage.

He hadn't Dueled for years, but he could still solve a puzzle at this level. Seeing his three schoolmates looked so frustrated by what seemed to be their repeated failures, Kento felt bad for them. Maybe it won't hurt to lend them a hand for this once.

"Activate Supervise to equip it to Gigaplant." Kento directed the becspectacled student who is still holding the iPad. Reflexively, the said student followed as he was told, equipping Supervise to Gigaplant.

"Activate Fine, then Chain the effect of Naturia Rock." Kento activated Fine, discarding Spore and Naturia Bamboo Shoot and then summoned Naturia Rock to the field in Attack Position.

"Activate Gigaplant's effect to Special Summon Naturia Bamboo Shoot from the Graveyard." Kento revived Bamboo Shoot from the Graveyard in Attack Position.

"Activate the effect of Genex Ally Birdman to return Naturia Bamboo Shoot to the hand to Special Summon it." Kento returned Bamboo Shoot that he just summoned back to the hand, and in exchange Special Summoned Genex Ally Birdman to the field in Attack Position.

"Release Rock and then Advance Summon Bamboo Shoot." Kento summoned back Bamboo Shoot again to the field, this time through Advance Summon. And since Bamboo Shoot was Advance Summoned by Releasing a Naturia Monster, opponent cannot activate Trap Cards.

"Activate the effect of Spore in the Graveyard to remove Cursed Fig from play to Special Summon Spore and increase its Level by 1." Kento activated Spore's effect, banishing Cursed Fig and then Special Summoned Spore in Attack Position with its Level increased to Level 2.

"Synchro Summon Red Daemon's Dragon using Spore and Gigaplant as Synchro Material Monsters." Kento summoned Red Daemon's Dragon in Attack Position.

"As Supervise was sent to the Graveyard, its effect was activated, Special Summoning 1 Normal Monster from the Graveyard." Kento revived Gigaplant in Attack Position.

"For the Battle Phase, Attack a Marshmallon with Red Daemon's Dragon." Kento declared Battle Phase. Red Daemon's Dragon destroyed one of the three Marshmallon. And due to Red Daemon's Dragon's effect, after damage calculation, all Defense Position monsters the opponent controls were destroyed following the first Marshmallon's destruction, destroying the remaining two Marshmallon.

"Lastly, Direct Attack with all of the remaining monsters." Kento declared the last step.

Gigaplant, Bamboo Shoot, and Genex Ally Birdman attacked the opponent directly, shaving the remaining LP until it reached 0.

[YOU WIN]

"You did it! You solved it!" The becspectacled student cheered upon seeing the notification on the screen.

"You're amazing, Hijiri!" The black-haired student patted Kento's shoulder and gave him a thumbs up.

"I didn't know you play Duel Monsters too!" Fumito heard once that Kento was wearing the Duel Disk for no other purpose other than for

communication and school works, so he assumed Kento was not interested in Duel Monsters game itself.

"Yeah. You always wear your Duel Disk but there's no card inserted." The becspectacled student said and then looked at his Duel Disk on his wrist.

"Not anymore. I only played when I was little." Kento admitted. He better make it clear that he had stopped Dueling for good before there's a misunderstanding.

"Why not?! You're good at it!"

"Yeah! We can play together if you want!"

Kento felt overwhelmed by the sudden barrage of questions directed at him by two of Fumito's friends. From how their eyes were sparkling, they were undoubtedly passionate Duelists. This won't be good for him if he lets them continue.

"No, I-"

Fortunately, Kento was saved when the bell that announced that lunchbreak would be over soon was heard throughout the school.

"It's about time for us to go back to class." Fumito stated after hearing the bell.

"What? Already?" The bespectacled student checked the time and was surprised that so much time had passed. They were so focused on solving the Duel Puzzle that they didn't realize the time.

"We better go back now." The black-haired student ushered his friends to go back to their class.

Walking towards the school building, Fumito turned back, facing Kento.

"See you later, Hijiri!" Fumito said while waiving his hand at him for a second before catching up to his two friends who walked ahead of him.

Even though Fumito said so, Kento thought that would be the first and the last time he'd talk with them.

The next day, he learned how wrong he was.

"Hijiri, help me with this Duel Puzzle. Me and my friends have difficulty solving this one too." Fumito requested. He visited Kento's class, sitting so casually on the chair in front of Kento's desk. He was holding an iPad showing another Duel Puzzle that was different from the one that he solved yesterday.

"… Why…?" Kento asked the enthusiastic Fumito.

"Because you're the only guy I know who can help me solve this. Come on, help us, please? I'll treat you to a lunch as thanks." Fumito pleaded.

"You'll never be a good Duelist if you keep asking someone else to solve the puzzle for you." Kento replied calmly as his way to refuse without hurting the other guy's feelings.

"Then teach us. Give us a clue to help us improve. Come on." Fumito leaned closer as he pleaded, eyes brimming with passion that unnerved Kento.

"Fine. Fine. I'll help. Just this once." Kento finally gave up and agreed to help.

Unbeknownst to him that time, the moment he consented to it, it didn't become a one-time thing.

Since then, Fumito, and sometimes together with his two friends, always played Duel Monsters against each other or solving Duel

Puzzle every lunch break. And soon, they, or to be more precise, Fumito, soon were forcing his way into Kento's private time on a daily basis. Kento's quiet world of solitude had been intruded upon by a Duel enthusiast (and his two friends), who would drag Kento into their circle with the excuse of giving them advice to become a better Duelists.

By the time they realized it, ten days had passed since Fumito's first request.

"Tohdo-kun… isn't it about time you give it a rest?" Kento finally told Fumito was sitting in front of him like usual.

"About what?" Fumito asked nonchalantly while arranging his Deck.

"Do you really need to ask when it's obvious you came to me every single day." Kento sweat dropped at Fumito's audacity to play clueless when he visited and asked the same thing without missing a day.

"I've made my decision, I won't stop until you play one game with me." Fumito answered, smiling so innocently with tinge of excitement oozing out from his cheerful aura.

"Why?" Kento asked again, close to feeling exhilarated.

"If you don't want it that much, give me one good reason why you don't like to Duel with me. Maybe I'll stop. Maybe. Just maybe." Fumito repeated the 'maybe' part three times to make it clear that he didn't promise he'll stop for good.

Kento groaned tiredly. He didn't want to tell him about what happened to him eight years ago when he was kidnapped. It wasn't a pleasant experience that he wished to tell to just anybody. And he didn't want to ruin Fumito's passion for Dueling with his story. But if he didn't tell Fumito, he'd never give up. Even though Fumito didn't make any promise, he'll take the chances to convince him to stop bothering him.

"I used to like Dueling… but I don't anymore…" Kento answered hesitantly. That was the only thing he could tell him without spilling the details.

"You used to like Dueling but now not anymore? But what about your Duel Disk?" Fumito pointed at the Duel Disk on Kento's wrist.

"I'm wearing this Duel Disk because it was a memento of my parents… We used to Duel a lot together…" Kento turned somber as he remembered his parents. Those days were one of his happiest. He enjoyed learning how to Duel from his parents and how they were proud of him when he won his first ever Duel against another kid. He loved Dueling back then. But now…

"But you're wearing that Duel Disk everywhere. That means you really don't want to hate Dueling, don't you? Because it holds your memories with your parents." Fumito said, his voice gentler than usual.

Kento's eyes widened, and after looking away from Fumito for a while, he faces him again, their eyes met. To Kento's surprise, what he saw in Fumito's gaze was neither pity nor sympathy but understanding and acceptance. Almost as if Fumito understood what exactly Kento was going through.

"Whenever we asked you to help us, you could've ignored us outright, or lashed out at us to leave you alone, but you never did. Why?" Fumito asked then.

Kento couldn't answer him. He couldn't deny what Fumito said. Because he sensed the truth in his words.

"Though you don't enjoy it anymore, deep down you can't bring yourself to hate Dueling. Isn't that why you never pushed us, never pushed me, away?" Fumito stood up from the seat to stand next to Kento.

Kento looked up to Fumito. Again, he couldn't deny what he said. It was as he said, even though he was afraid, even though he couldn't enjoy it anymore, in the end, he never hated Dueling. If he had, he would've already thrown everything away. His Deck. His Duel Disk. But he couldn't. Because he never hated it.

"Let's do it step by step. It'll take time, but I'm sure you can enjoy Dueling again like you used to." Fumito gently grasped Kento's arm and then pulled him up, making stand from his seat. His gentle smile turned brighter.

"Don't worry, I'll help you out! Let's try enjoying Dueling together!"

Park - Hibiki Research Facility - Outskirt of Den City - Present Time

"That's how we started becoming friends." Kento couldn't refuse Fumito at all. He was always pulled into Fumito's pace, and gradually, he enjoyed his and his friends' company.

"But the most surprising was when he and Kazue met. Never thought he'd fall for her at first sight. It took six months to get the two of them together." Kento sighs pleasantly as he recalls Fumito's face that became a blushing mess that time when he first introduced him to Kazue.

"Fumito was a nice and sweet person. It didn't take long for me to fall for him too. We were happy back then." Kazue giggles as she remembers the first time she met Fumito.

Den Station - Den City - Two Years Ago

Due to her study to become a successor of Hibiki Enterprise when her father retires, Kazue and Kento couldn't meet up for a whole week. Today, she finally got free time to hang out with him. When she informed Kento about this, Kento told her that he had someone

that he wanted to introduce to her. This was unexpected since Kento never brought anybody else whenever they hung out together. She wondered what kind of person Kento was bringing with him.

As usual, she was picking him up at the station. When she noticed him, she was surprised to see him grabbing someone's hair. He was not the type who'd usually go physically violent in the open, so what was he doing? Kazue couldn't let this slide. She ran towards him and delivered a smack on the back of his head.

"Kento! Don't bully someone like that!" Kazue scolded her childhood friend who was rubbing the back of his head that she smacked. But she wasn't finished with just a smack, she then pinched his right ear.

"Ow! Ow! That hurts, Kazue! He started it!" Kento whined between his wincing.

"Doesn't matter! Don't use violence like that!" Kazue firmly retorted.

"But it's okay if *you* are the one being violent?" Kento argued back with the fact that Kazue was pinching his ear.

"Umm… it's nothing serious, really."

Kazue gasped when she noticed that the person who spoke was the one whose hair Kento grabbed. He was still standing behind them. Kazue quickly let go of Kento's ear to properly face the person behind her.

He was a boy of their age. From the uniform he was wearing, she assumed that he also attended the same school as Kento, and the one that Kento wanted to introduce to her. He has brown hair with dark green spikes. He has fair skin and a pair of teal-colored eyes like an aventurine gemstone. And when their eyes met, his cheeks suddenly turned shades of pink.

"I'm really sorry about that. Kento can be a bit rough at times, but he is a good boy. Are you all right?" Kazue asked, looking quite

concerned at the state of his messy hair as the result of Kento grabbing him. She bowed down in apology, "Please forgive my friend here."

"Wh-what? Oh, I, u-uh…" The boy stuttered and flailed before finding his words, "Not at all! We-we're just joking around! You know, the usual guy friends' joke!"

Kazue blinked when she heard him. Did she just hear him right? Did he really say what she thought it was?

"Friend? You're Kento's friend?" Kazue looked at the boy eagerly, taking a step closer to him, which made his face even redder.

"Yeah! We're best friends, in fact! My name is Fumito Tohdo!" The boy introduced himself.

Kazue looked at Kento, silently asking, 'is what he said true?', and when Kento nodded his head, Kazue teared up.

"My baby brother… Finally made a friend…" Kazue, as quick as a wind, brought out her mobile phone and started pressing Kento's aunt's phone number. "I must report this to Auntie and Uncle! Kento finally brought home a friend! This is a day to celebrate! We must throw a huge party!"

After eight years of living in solitude with her as his only friend, Kento finally made another friend from his school. He even brought his friend to be introduced all the way from Tokyo. Their lifelong wish has finally come true. Kento's aunt and uncle would be ecstatic once they knew that Kento brought his new friend.

"Stop it, Kazue! You're overreacting! And I'm not your baby brother!" Kento restrained his childhood friend by grasping the hand that was holding her mobile phone and then snatched it from her, his face blushing hard from embarrassment.

"Oh, please. I can still remember how you liked tailing behind me while calling me 'Big Sis' when we were little." Kazue teased and patted his head.

"D-don't bring that up here!" Kento moved away from Kazue to avoid further embarrassment, still holding her phone.

"I'm so relieved that Kento has a good friend like you. Please continue be his friend." Kazue held Fumito's hands together, unable to contain her happiness at the good news.

"D-definitely!" Fumito replied, face still red.

"The car is already waiting outside. Let's go." Kazue walked ahead of them, gesturing to them to follow.

"Kento… is she your girlfriend?" Fumito asked while they were walking behind Kazue.

"Would a girlfriend ever refer her boyfriend as a baby brother?" Kento sighed tiredly. He couldn't imagine him and Kazue ever becoming a couple.

"Then, do you have a cru-"

"She's a childhood friend who is like a big sister to me. That's all." Kento firmly stated before Fumito could finish the 'c' word. Fumito let out a sigh with a smile when Kento answered, which didn't go unnoticed. "Did you just sigh in relief?"

Kento turned to his best friend and blinked when he saw Fumito's face gradually turn from shades of pink to full red, almost as red as a tomato. Kento was no expert, but he wasn't that dense not to know what that face meant.

"No way. Don't tell me that you've-" Kento's mouth was covered by Fumito's hand before he could say it out loud the meaning of Fumito's expression.

"Q-quiet!" Fumito gestured to Kazue who was looking back at them, and Fumito shook his head to tell her that it was nothing important, an answer that Kazue accepted, and she proceeded to walk ahead again. Only then, Fumito finally removed his hands from Kento's mouth.

"Wow… Love at first sight *is* real…" Kento was honestly shocked. He had heard a lot about love at first sight, but believed it was just something that happened in fiction. Now, like it or not, he got to believe that love at first sight is something that can really happen in real life.

Kazue was popular, but she was hardly interested in anybody. She preferred to keep her distance because there were many people who approached her with no-good intention. Since she's so passionate about her studies in machinery, she never really thought about romance. Maybe this would be the perfect opportunity to give Kazue an experience in romance. Since they were children, Kazue was only focus on taking care of him due to the incident, and he always felt about it because he felt he robbed Kazue her chance to form relationship with people other than him. Now that he has gotten better, she shouldn't worry too much about him.

Just as she had helped him, now it was his turn to help her. Fumito was his best friend, a kind-hearted guy, friendly, and open-minded. His honesty and willingness to understand would make it easy for him to get close to Kazue. With those qualities, Fumito would be a good match for Kazue.

"I don't mind if it's you. I can help hook you up with her." Kento told Fumito, grinning when that caused Fumito's face to redden again.

"W-what?! I-I never said that I-I want t-to g-go out with h-her!" Fumito lamely denied. His words didn't match his expression.

"Sure, you are~" Kento's grin widened. He was going to have so much fun with this.

"Kento!"

Park - Hibiki Research Facility - Outskirt of Den City - Present Time

Everybody suddenly falls silent at that. They are staring at Kento and Kazue with a surprised look.

"Something wrong?" Kento asks, confused by the look his friends are giving him and Kazue.

"You and Kazue are not dating?!" Ai finally exclaims while pointing to the two of them back and forth.

"Huh?!" Kento and Kazue react at the same time with identical expressions.

"We always thought the two of you are dating." Kusanagi tells them.

"You two always stick like a glue." Flame points out.

Whether it's at school or outside school, they always see Kento and Kazue together. At school, before finding out Yusaku and Takeru's identity, Kento and Kazue always have their lunch together. And then after school they walk home or ride Kazue's car together. And going to Cafe Nagi, Kento and Kazue hardly without each other's company. Can anyone blame them for believing the two of them are in a romantic relationship?

"We are not. We are childhood friends. Nothing more, nothing less." Kento had lost count of how many times he had said this to clear up the misunderstanding.

"Yes. Kento is strictly my baby brother and my boyfriend's best friend." Kazue states. She's getting a bit tired of having to clarify for who knows how many times already that she and Kento are not in an intimate relationship. Kento is a good person, and she has no doubt

he'd make a wonderful boyfriend himself, but as someone who grew up together with him since toddler, Kento is more like a family to her.

"Eh, no, I'm not your baby brother. Cut that out." Kento lightly hit his childhood friend's head. He does consider Kazue like a sister, but he has grown passed the age of being called a baby. Seriously, how long is she going to treat him like a little kid?

"Wait, you said 'were', so Kazue is not dating this Fumito guy anymore?" Ai asks, noticing the use of past tense.

Kento and Kazue freeze. They got caught up in the atmosphere that they forgot the fact that they inevitably must reveal should they talk about Fumito. They can't avoid revealing everything now.

"Fumito died in an accident two months ago…" Kazue is the one who answers first. Her excitement dies down as she's reminded of the cold fact.

"Often times we still can't believe that he's already gone. It's only thanks to Fumito that I can muster up the courage to start Dueling again." Kento lets the words out painfully. He never meant to say this, but it just naturally comes out and he can't stop himself.

Back then, being with Fumito was always fun. He was never bored with Fumito by his side. But that happiness made him forget an important fact…

There's nothing that lasts forever.

When Fumito died, Kento was painfully reminded of that fact. He mustn't assume that people that he loved will always be there with him. Anything could happen that'll take them away from him. What happened to his parents and Fumito was undeniable proof.

"I know that Fumito wouldn't want me and Kento to be depressed over him. It'll take time, but I'm sure we'll come to terms with it eventually." Kazue smiles, trying not to let her sadness shown.

They're supposed to be having fun today, she mustn't ruin it with her emotional outburst.

Takeru knows those faces. He had made that face before. Because he had experienced the same feeling at Kento and Kazue. No. That's not right. He is still feeling that way to this day.

"He must be a really great friend." Takeru smiles back at Kazue and Kento, trying to lift the atmosphere again without having to avoid the topic of the conversation. "Did you often Duel with Fumito-kun?"

Simply changing the subject won't help. And Fumito is a precious person for both Kento and Kazue. They mustn't avoid it. It honors the deceased and the people who are still alive to share memories of the friend who have passed on, whether long ago or more recently. They shouldn't specifically talk about the moment of his death, but the happiness they shared with him when he was alive to not let it be forgotten.

"Yes. But without using our Duel Disks and not in LINK VRAINS." Kazue answers, appreciating Takeru trying to prevent the atmosphere from getting colder.

"How skilled he was?" Kusanagi asks as well.

"I think he was pretty strong. More than average Duelists. He was a fast learner if he actually put his mind to it. He was the type who prefers having fun than caring about winning or losing." Kento explains. After he got to know Fumito, he realized that Fumito could've solved the puzzle himself with a couple more tries without having to ask him. There were two reasons why he pretended that he couldn't: First, to encourage his two friends to try solving it on their own without depending on him. Second, as an excuse to get Kento to talk to him. Once they finally started Dueling, Fumito didn't go easy on him.

"What kind of Deck he used?" Yusaku chimes in to keep the conversation flowing naturally, seeing Kento and Kazue's faces lit up

when talking about Fumito again.

Before they know it, Kento and Kazue start to talk more and more about Fumito. What he liked, moments they shared, everything they remember. They can't stop themselves. Strange. Before, they avoid talking about Fumito as much as possible because they're afraid that the emotions coming out from remembering them would sadden them. It would make it harder for them to forget, to move on. But somehow, now, they keep talking about Fumito.

Without anyone noticing, Takeru watches Kento and Kazue who are happily sharing their stories about Fumito. He looks down at his own clenched hands. His heart aching from the feelings he had long bottled up and not yet ready to open out of fear he'd break down from the overwhelming sadness and regret. He must endure it a bit more.

" *I… need to pull myself together…"*

Guest Room - Hibiki Research Facility - Outskirt of Den City

After lunch, the whole day was spent touring the whole facility and dinner. While touring the facility, Kazue allowed Kusanagi and Yusaku to try out the available equipment and take a look at the facility's system to study them. As she promised, she set the prototype of Real Solid Vision to each of their Duel Disks and promised she will install the final product once it's completed. By the time they finished the tour, it was already nighttime, so they had dinner together before being escorted to the guest room.

The facility is not small but it's not that big either, so there are limited guest rooms available that aren't used. Kazue arranged for the four guys to share a room with two additional beds provided for them. Exhaustion from all the activities during daytime finally caught up to them, sending the guys to the world of dreams the moment they're lying comfortably on their beds.

For half of them, at least.

Kento wakes up when he hears low voices near the balcony. Fighting back dizziness, he rubs his eyes and forces himself awake. He looks towards the opened balcony, the moonlight shines through the door, showering Yusaku and Ai with its light. The pair are on the floor with cards spread in front of them.

"You're not sleeping yet, Yusaku-kun?" Kento approaches the duo.

"I can't sleep, so I thought about adjusting my Deck." Despite all their activities, Yusaku doesn't feel sleepy. When he closed his eyes, he couldn't bring himself to drift to sleep no matter how hard he tried. Rather than forcing himself to an uncomfortable sleep, Yusaku thought that doing something until he finally wanted to sleep would be better.

"It's too bad that our Duel was cancelled." Kento says, also sitting on the floor next to Yusaku.

"We would've kicked Yusaku and Flame's butt with our combo." Ai says haughtily.

"I see, looks like you prefer to be with Kento. Okay then, goodbye, Ai. Have fun with your new partner." Yusaku pushes Ai closer towards Kento.

"I'm just kiddin'! It's a joke! Jest! You're my one and only partner! I'm sorry!" Ai desperately clings to Yusaku's sleeve, eliciting a chuckle from Kento.

"Kuri…" At the mention of Duel, Saint Kuriboh, who is back to inside its robotic body, is rolling in disappointment. It was excited at the prospect of joining the Duel with Real Solid Vision, only for that chance to be crushed because of incomplete programming before it could get its turn.

"You'll get your turn next time, Saint Kuriboh. There's no way I'm going to let one of my aces missing this opportunity." Kento picks up his ace monster, patting it gently to comfort it.

"Saint Kuriboh is your ace?" Ai repeats in surprise and confusion, "Why? You already have Elpizo Harpe. And you have other monsters that are stronger to be your ace."

Ai didn't say it with the intention of demeaning Saint Kuriboh, really. He only said so based on experience and facts. Yusaku's Decode Talker and Firewall Dragon, Revolver's Varelload Dragon, Takeru's Salamangreat Heatleo, all of them are powerful monsters with high ATKs and strong effects that help them from time to time to achieve their victory.

Yusaku looks like he's going to reprimand his A.I. partner, but Kento raises his hand, gesturing to Yusaku not to say anything as he wants to say.

"Ai, what do you think an ace card is?" Kento asks back. His voice soft, not hinting any anger at Ai's earlier remark. Kento understands where Ai is coming from. When he said so, it was purely out of curiosity, and he doesn't blame him.

"Is it a card that has a high Attack Power? Is it a card that has a special ability? Of course, that may be one of the factors, but I don't think that's all." The Duelists that Ai had encountered all have powerful monsters as their aces, including his own Elpizo Harpe. It's understandable that gave Ai the perception that ace monsters must be the strong ones. Not just Ai, he is sure that's how people generally think. However, Kento thinks differently. And it becomes all the more true after he developed the ability to communicate with monsters.

"All Duelists put their souls into crafting decks with their hands. Among them, there are special pieces that we can fight together and trust from the bottom of our hearts. Sometimes, it may get destroyed. It may be taken advantage of by our opponent. Even so, there's a

bond that cannot be broken." Kento can sense it every time he's fighting together with his monsters by his side. They wholeheartedly support him. And among them, the ones who support him the most, are Elpizo Harpe and Saint Kuriboh. And not just in Duel, Saint Kuriboh has been helping in many little things since the very beginning. That's why he can trust Saint Kuriboh.

"And if you truly believe them, that cards will respond. Those special pieces. The same goes for Yusaku-kun and Takeru-kun's ace cards. Am I wrong?" Kento turns to Yusaku. He nods, agreeing with his point. Maybe he can't communicate with monsters the same way Kento does, but he can sense their monsters' intentions and believe in them.

"Ai, we will become stronger. We will fight against various opponents. And to become stronger, we mustn't forget that the other person has the same feelings as we are. Our opponents will challenge us with a deck full of soul. And we'll have to do our best to respond." Yusaku believes that only if they can do that will they be true Duelists.

Ai goes silent in contemplation. As an A.I., it's his nature to think logically based on available data. That's why it feels natural for him that only the exceptionally strong monsters can be considered as aces. Though Ignis have free will, the spiritual notion of bonding with their monsters is something they're still learning. Perhaps, for the exception of Divine Ignis who can communicate with them. Ignis can connect with their human partners like they do their fellow Ignis, but it never crossed their minds of doing the same to their own monsters. Just because they don't speak, just because they don't behave the same way, it doesn't mean they don't feel anything. Ai realizes now that they've taken their monsters for granted.

"I'm sorry, Saint Kuriboh…" Ai bows his head down apologetically, feeling ashamed.

"Kuri." Saint Kuriboh jumps with a smile, forgiving the Dark Ignis.

"As long as you understand, Ai. Now, back to your deck, do you have something in your mind?" Kento turns to Yusaku again, looking at the cards he placed on the floor.

Yusaku has been brainstorming of what strategy that would work against Bohman's Hydradrive. Along with the new strategy, he also must consider the cards he's going to use that requires taking out the cards originally on his deck and replacing them with new ones.

"I'll add this and take this out, then if I pair it with this card…" Yusaku mumbles while rearranging the cards for his Deck.

"Oh! This is good!" Ai is impressed by Yusaku's idea, confident that this would be a good addition. "We can use this in the next Duel, Yusaku-"

Ai pauses as he looks at Yusaku. The sudden pause prompts Kento to follow towards the direction where Ai's eyes are looking. His eyes widen as he sees what made Ai go quiet.

Yusaku is smiling down at his cards.

It's not the calm smile that he occasionally shows. It's not the kind that is loud either.

It's a smile that bursts with life purely in the joy of Dueling.

"EEEHHH?!"

Ai shouts in shock, startling Yusaku and Kento, and waking up Kusanagi and Takeru who were already asleep. Kusanagi and Takeru sit up on their bed when the shout reaches their ears, Takeru quickly scrambled for his glasses to see what's going on while Kusanagi grabs his pillow as he stands up from his bed, looking around the room cautiously.

"What's wrong?! Is there an enemy attack?!" Takeru readies his aikido stance.

"Are you okay, Yusaku, Kento, Ai?!" Kusanagi asks concernedly.

"C-calm down you two! We're fine! Ai just suddenly shouted." Kento tries to assure their friends who are still half-asleep.

"What's with you all of a sudden?!" Yusaku frowns at Ai, shooting him an annoyed glare for the disturbance he caused.

"Oh, uh… you see… I… saw a ghost!" Ai lies lamely. He doesn't particularly feel the desire to comment on the cause of his surprise. If he points it out, he is worried that would make Yusaku avoid of showing such expression next time out of embarrassment.

Yusaku and Kento resist the urge to slap their foreheads at the utterly transparent lie. Since Kusanagi and Takeru are still in the state of coming in and out of their sleep, they can't comprehend properly what Ai is saying, only that they've lowered their guards.

"At least came up with a better lie." Yusaku retorts flatly. Not feeling like arranging his deck anymore, Yusaku goes out to the balcony to get some fresh air.

"Sorry for disturbing you. Come on, go back to sleep." Kento ushers the half-asleep Kusanagi and Takeru back to their beds. Since they're half-sleep, they're quick to return to their slumber the moment they slump back on their beds.

Kento picks up Ai who is still on the floor inside Yusaku's Duel Disk. The two of them pass a smile at each other. Kento understands why Ai reacted the way he did. From his observation of Yusaku since they first met, which was only several days ago, Yusaku is not the type who can properly express his emotions like they are, especially the positive ones. The expression he wears most of the time is neutral. He does smile occasionally, but those smiles are nothing compared to the smile they just saw. It was truly a rare sight to behold.

Yusaku couldn't enjoy Dueling after the Lost Incident. To him, Dueling is a tool for survival. And because of that incident, forming a relationship with people was a hard task, something that Kento knows all too well. He has gotten better after defeating Knights of Hanoi. However, judging from the little conversations Kento heard while they're together, and Ai's reaction earlier, confirms to him that expressing his joy in Dueling and everything else in general is still something that Yusaku is trying to get accustomed to. That's why, to see Yusaku making that expression was a big step towards improvement.

Kento brings Ai together with him to the balcony, standing next to Yusaku who is looking at the stars-filled night sky.

"Sorry for the fuss, Yusaku-kun. Ai didn't mean anything bad. We're just glad that… you seem to be having fun." Kento tells Yusaku, apologizing on Ai's behalf. The said A.I. is fiddling with his fingers nervously.

Yusaku blinks at them. Come to think of it, it was odd that Kusanagi suddenly changed his mind when Kazue offered to give him the newest equipment in exchange for their help. Kazue also made that offer a day right after they returned from Windy's world. She asked for their help, but other than that one Duel that got cancelled, Kazue didn't ask anything more. Instead, they spent the rest of the day having fun. And this place, the preparations are too accommodating for people who are tasked with assisting in testing new products. It's more like they're having a vacation.

" *Could it be… they're doing all this to help me relax? Not just me, but Kusanagi-san and Takeru too?"* Yusaku finally realizes their intentions. They must have been worried about him after he focused on solving that data they found immediately right after he just logged out from Windy's world. Helping them with testing Real Solid Vision was just an excuse. This was their way of telling him to take a break.

Yusaku scolds himself for being stupid. Of course, his friends would worry about him if he's pushing himself like that. Kusanagi is already

worrying about his brother, and now Yusaku made Kusanagi worried about him with his overeagerness to find a lead. And his action urged his friends to push themselves as well to ease his burden. He must stop acting this way. Carrying all the responsibility all by himself. This is not just his fight. Everyone is in it.

"Thanks. I'm sorry for worrying you." Yusaku smiles softly both in apology and gratitude.

"Not a big deal. Seeing you happy is more than enough." Kento smiles back.

Yusaku stiffens hearing that. Happy. Does he look happy? For the past ten years, happiness was something that he didn't even dare dream of. He never imagined that he'd be happy. When was the last time he had played with his friends? When was the last time he felt happy? He had forgotten how it feels to enjoy spending time with friends.

Ever since the incident, he couldn't interact with his peers. He distanced himself from everyone. Even with Kusanagi, they never hung out together like friends should because they dedicated themselves entirely to fight against Knights of Hanoi. When they defeated Hanoi, Kusanagi was mostly busy with taking care of Jin and Yusaku just passed his days as usual while occasionally helping out Kusanagi with managing his food truck. This would be the first time that he hangs out with his friends. Normally like any other person his age.

"Hey, Yusaku…" Ai looks up to his partner.

"What?" Yusaku looks back. It's unusual for his A.I. partner to be so nervous like this when talking to him.

"Do you think… you're enjoy Dueling now…?" Ai asks hesitantly. He wants to make sure if that is truly the meaning behind the smile Yusaku made. But he is also afraid that this would be an insensitive question for his partner if it turns out he's wrong.

Ai is prepared to receive a scolding from Yusaku or a glare at the least. On the contrary, Yusaku stays quiet, seemingly lost in thought. When Yusaku first Dueled Onizuka, he wanted to Duel him a bit longer, and that's why he didn't run away even though he could. Today, he also felt the same way. Was that desire spurn from excitement? From enjoyment of the Duel itself?

"… It's just… in that moment, in that instant… all I could think of is that… I want to Duel more with this Deck." Yusaku answers honestly. His chest was pounding at the mere thought of trying out his new strategies in his Duel. There was something warm that came to his brain roaring his body into the purr of anticipation. His smile grew of its own accord when the thought crossed his mind.

"Fumito once told me, though you don't enjoy it anymore, deep down you can't bring yourself to hate Dueling. That must be how it was with Takeru-kun, and so are you now, Yusaku-kun." Kento clenches his fists and raises them up to his chest, "Let's do it step by step. It'll take time, but I'm sure you can enjoy Dueling again like you used to. I'll help you out. Let's enjoy Dueling again together."

Yusaku stares hard at Kento. Spending time with his friends this whole day made him feel completely at ease. He wants to spend more time with them. If he is to describe that feeling, that desire, then yes, joy is the best word. Since he felt this way, that means, that feeling he had when he started to Duel Kento together with Flame and disappointment that followed when the Duel was abruptly cancelled, that was enjoyment. It's still small, but it has begun to sprout. The feeling that he had forgotten is slowly returning.

This is only possible thanks to the friends he has made.

"I'm glad that you look happy too now, Kento." Yusaku replies. He was worried when Kento and Kazue looked a bit down when they spoke about Fumito, but thankfully, Takeru managed to encourage them to talk more by focusing on the positive side of things.

"Yeah. I was afraid to talk about Fumito before because it caused so much discomfort for both me and Kazue. There was a time when we couldn't even dare to mention him for a week. But after a talk we had this morning, I realized that was wrong." Kento finally understood after he talked about Fumito, sharing his experience with his late friend. He was being immature by avoiding talking about Fumito. Death and loss scared them, and fear make them feel awkward and uncomfortable. It's completely natural - but it's important to feel the discomfort and push beyond it, for himself and Kazue.

"After all, we are the holders of Fumito's memories. Who else remembers Fumito over time? We received his love, celebrated milestones, benefitted from their interest in us, shared life experiences. Our memories together are valuable and life-affirming." In the future, Kento will experience another loss like all human beings inevitably. He'd be sad, he'd cry, but he won't forget.

"You told me before, Yusaku-kun. That you are willing to help me until I can break free from my nightmare. I want to help you too. Don't hesitate to rely on me. I'll help you in any way I can to the best of my ability." Kento reminds Yusaku of the time when they first Dueled. Kento was happy and deeply moved when Yusaku said that to him. That's why he wants to do the same for Yusaku.

"I'll be counting on you from now on, Kento." Yusaku extends his hand to Kento, hoping for a handshake.

"Likewise, I'll be counting on you, Yusaku-kun." Kento accepts the hand, firmly handshaking with Yusaku.

Kento had always admired Fumito. His best friend had pulled him out from his shell, showing him a new bright world. Whenever he was with his best friend, he always felt inspired to be someone who can help others the same way Fumito did to him.

This time, he wants to become that person. He wants to become someone that can help his friend.

"I'm here too! Don't turn me into a third wheel here! You have me, your partner, by your side!" Ai intrudes, placing himself between Kento and Yusaku, huffing at them for forgetting his presence and leaving him out.

"Being a hostage suits you more." Yusaku then he looks away, much to Ai's dismay.

"I got rejected!" Ai says dramatically.

Kento laughs softly at the exchange between the two. Seeing them bickering reminds him of his time with Fumito and their other friends. Even if nothing lasts forever, he wishes to be with his friends for as long as he can. That's why he wants to protect this moment. He wants to protect this everyday life.

No matter what the hurdle is, no matter who his opponents are, Kento will fight.

NEXT CHAPTER PREVIEW:

Chapter 10 - Menacing Scent: One of SOL Technologies' associates visit Hibiki Research Facility for further discussion about the two companies' joint project. During discussion, someone hacks into the facility's server and causes chaos to the whole building. Kazue logs in to handle the intruder.

AUTHOR'S NOTE:

As promised, I finally gave you more info about Kento's best friend and Kazue's boyfriend, Fumito. What do you think of him? I hope you like him enough for his first impression. As someone who has a big impact in both Kento and Kazue's life, Fumito would be frequently shown in future chapters and not just this one.

You might think this chapter is a filler, but I personally believe it's not. One of the gripes I have for *Yu-Gi-Oh! VRAINS* is that it jumps too quickly from one action to another, not giving the characters more time to just relax and hang out like friends would. It felt like they really didn't have a true relationship with one another besides coming together for a common cause. The anime failed to present better opportunities for some of the characters to properly socialize with one another as friends, and that's why I wrote this chapter.

My decision to add Real Solid Vision technology from ARC-V to VRAINS is because on some occasions in the anime, Ai is shown capable of physical touch in real life even though he is supposed to be a data. There's no explanation whatsoever how he managed to materialize physically in the real world. Also, at the end of the Duel between Ai and Pandor, when the former defeated the latter, Pandor suffered physical damage as if being hit by real flame. Again, without an explanation. That's why I decided to include Real Solid Vision Technology as the explanation. And sci-fic is not my expertise, so please understand.

The next chapter, after quite an absent, Kazue will once again take the spotlight!

TRIVIA

1. The school that Kento and Fumito used to attend is based on the real-life Tokyo Gakugei Koganei Junior High School in Japan.

2. Ajitsuke tamago or Ramen eggs are Japanese soft-boiled eggs marinated in a sweet and savory soy marinade. You'll find these commonly placed on top of ramen.

3. Onigirazu is a type of Japanese sushi sandwich that can be prepared quickly and with various fillings.

4. The Duel Puzzle included in the flashback is one of the Duel Puzzles from *Yu-Gi-Oh! 5D's World Championship 2011: Over the*

Nexus .

Menacing Scent

RESPONSE TO REVIEW

Big thanks to ***tsukikami02, Elfianna, HunterHQ, Ulrich362, kaiser Younes, Guests*** for reviewing the previous chapter!

tsukikami02: Glad that you like Fumito. Since I decided that this chapter should be about them taking a break, I purposely did not let the Duel go for long.

Elfianna: In VRAINS anime episode 4-5, it was implied that Yusaku enjoyed his Duel against Go and that's why he didn't escape when Kusanagi opened the path for him. But yeah, the anime hardly showed Yusaku just enjoying the Duel, that's why I added this. I do plan on adding romance, but it won't be a focus and it's still very much much later in the story.

HunterHQ: Putting aside how he picked and kidnapped the victims, Dr. Kogami is a genius researcher working for SOL Technologies, so I'm sure he had huge amount of salary and funding enough to set up his own personal facility without rousing suspicion.

It was already explained that Bohman's claim about backup and whatnot during his Duel against Playmaker was only a false memory implanted by Lightning because he was still not stable.

If you're talking about Dr. Kogami's assistants' identities, their identities must've already been exposed along with Dr. Kogami when the incident came to light. They knew Dr. Kogami was the culprit, no way they didn't know about the assistants, since it was mentioned, they were detained for a few years before released, so there's no point in Lightning blackmailing their identities since SOL Tech already knew anyway.

If you're talking about the victims' identities, Windy's partner was already attacked, Lightning already infected Miyu with virus, and Specter doesn't even bother keeping his identity a secret, so there isn't any point in blackmailing them with their identities. Lightning is pleased that Earth is killed because it's obvious that Earth would never join him after what he did to Aqua But that doesn't mean that Lightning considered SOL Tech to be a potential pawn to use. Besides, Lightning's superiority complex compels him to prove himself superior to humans (and other Ignis), winning against Playmaker and the others will prove that A.I.s can rule over humanity. Also, there's Akira in SOL. Akira, despite his position, is willing to go against orders if the situation demands him to, so he'd do his best to stop Lightning from interfering. There's no way Lightning didn't have Akira in mind. So, Lightning getting SOL Tech to do his dirty work is not going to happen.

It's not luck, again, it's a matter of numbers and Bohman was not in a stable state at that time, so it's risky for Lightning's team to go to the real world like before. And Revolver also gave Yusaku and the others the protection program, so they can't be attacked in the real world even if Lightning wants to. That's why Lightning had to force Kusanagi to log in by himself to blackmail him. And prior to that, Lightning's main objective was to complete Bohman before facing Playmaker and the others, that's why he hardly took action unless the possibility of team-up like Revolver attempted to with Blood Shepherd happened.

No, there won't be any Integration Summon. The use of Real Solid Vision for Duels would be limited here since the focus is still LINK VRAINS.

Kazue had arranged for them to have the room for themselves so nobody could watch the Duel unless they went inside the room. I forgot to add that explanation when I first uploaded the chapter, but I already added that detail now. Yusaku is still new to the Deck, so there are things that he didn't think of.

For the rest, I won't answer to avoid spoilers.

Ulrich362: I know, I also prefer stories that are more like DM-VRAINS. SEVENS and Go Rush are more comedic, I much prefer more serious stories like the previous YGO. And yeah, you're being pessimistic, I already told you that the girls will get their moments to shine. (^_^)

kaiser Younes: Exactly. They could've spared one or two episodes to have the characters taking a break like normal people are.

Guest 1: I never played God of War, but yes, there'll be more monsters based on the Olympian gods.

Guest 2: I'm sorry, but I don't understand your question. Which part of chapter 3 that you mean? Because I don't remember addressing someone to stop bothering me in that chapter.

Guest 3: Thank you for pointing that out, I've fixed it.

Guest 4: Thank you.

Guest reviewers, please write a name instead of just Guest to make it easier for me to know whether this is the same Guest reviewer or not.

CHAPTER 10:

Menacing Scent

(Kyōhaku-tekina Kaori)

Kazue's Room - Hibiki Research Facility - Outskirt of Den City

Kazue opens her eyes. Waking up comes real slow and relaxed, as if the day was kind enough to come softly into focus. She takes a moment to shed the sleep from her brain, to allow the visions of the

night to give way to the sunny day. From the window, she heard birds chirping, their tiny voices bring a calmness to mind, a soothing melody. She sits up, stretching her stiff arms while letting out a soft yawn that's barely audible.

She looks at the clock hanging on the wall across from her. It's already 08.00 AM, two hours later than her usual schedule. Normally, her body will wake up on her own at 06.00 AM. She unexpectedly has a good night's sleep. Very comfortable that she woke up late. Fortunately, there's no school today and there's still one hour until her father arrives.

After their conversation yesterday, she thought she'd have trouble sleeping or having a dream about Fumito. Before, whenever the topic about Fumito came up, she always had trouble sleeping from thinking so much about him. When she did sleep, she'll dream about him, both good and bad. Because of it, she avoided talking much about Fumito.

Strangely, yesterday, she and Kento were able to talk about Fumito. They shared their memories about him with their new friends without trouble. And after that, she could sleep well. What made yesterday different from usual?

Kazue reaches her mobile phone, opening the folder containing photos and picks the photo showing herself with Fumito. It was a picture taken on their first date.

" *I still miss him… I still yearn to be with him… So why yesterday I was fine?"* Kazue wonders. That was the first time in a long while that she could talk so freely, so happily about Fumito. Before, she couldn't help but kept thinking about his last moments whenever she remembered or spoke about him.

" *Was that it…? Because yesterday I only think of our happier days with him without recalling my sadness?"* Kazue deduces. Thinking about it again, Takeru and the others kept the conversation going without delving into Fumito's death itself but urging them to think of

the many fun and joyful days she and Kento had with Fumito that didn't leave a room for them to think about the void in their hearts.

"But is that okay…? Isn't that no different from running away? If I do not have intense pain over him being gone, I do not miss him…" Kazue clutches her chest. The pain of grief is gut wrenching, but then so does the anticipation of not having grief over someone so loved.

All was quiet until a jolting, but steady thumping sprang from the door of her room.

"Ms. Kazue, are you awake?"

A male voice calls from the other side of the door. Kazue recognizes his voice as one of the staff working in the laboratory.

"Yes. Please, wait a minute." Kazue stands up from her bed, reaching for her jacket to cover her sleeveless night gown before unlocking the door and opening it, facing the staff member. "Is there something you need?"

"My apologies for disturbing you in the morning. But President Hibiki has just called to inform us that he'll be late due to an emergency meeting." He told her.

"There's something else, isn't it?" Kazue asks. Judging from how he went out of his way to personally wake her up, there must be another thing that he feels the need to inform her. And it must be something important that requires her to be awake at this moment.

"Yes. He also said there'll be someone from SOL Technologies coming here in two hours to discuss the progress of our joint work." He relayed the most important message.

Kazue stiffens at the message. She wouldn't have minded if it's only her or Kento here, but right now, Yusaku, Kusanagi, Takeru, Ai, and Flame are in this facility. Her intuition insistently tells her that letting

them meet with whoever this person sent by SOL Technologies won't be a good thing.

No time to waste.

"I'll get prepared now. Gather everyone at the living room."

Guest Room - Hibiki Research Facility - Outskirt of Den City

After taking a quick warm shower and changing to her casual formal attire, Kazue quickly brings food, snacks, and drinks to the guest room where Kento and the others are staying. She brought enough amount to last until night. They need that much to not starve while waiting in their room the whole day.

The guys were surprised when Kazue slammed open the door of their room so suddenly, waking up some of the occupants who were still sleeping. She explained the reason why she woke them up so quickly and brought the food and drink into their room.

"To summarize the whole thing, someone from SOL Technologies will arrive in two hours?" Kusanagi asks after listening to Kazue's explanation.

"Yes. I'm sorry, but Fujiki-kun, Homura-kun, Kusanagi-san, just in case, please stay in this room until they leave. I think it's better that way to protect your identities and hide Ai and Flame." Kazue tells them. Kento is exempt from this because he had met with some people from SOL Technologies before, so they are already familiar with him.

"Why? It's not like we're going to expose ourselves out in the open." Ai asks, confused. All this time he has accompanied Yusaku to wherever he goes. When they're outside, he made sure to stay inside the Duel Disk until there's nobody else in vicinity. It shouldn't make any difference even if Yusaku and the others meet someone from SOL Technologies now.

"True, but whoever is coming from SOL Technologies may get interested in Yusaku-kun and ask questions if they learn you're helping us with the testing. You don't want to catch their attention, right?" Kento points out the possibility. Hibiki Enterprise is one of the biggest companies in Den City, only no. 2 after SOL Technologies. Usually, Kazue's father would ask people to become testers after a thorough investigation of their background. Everybody knows this. She managed to vouch for Yusaku and the others so that he won't pry further about them, but if SOL Technologies learn about them, it's likely they won't stay quiet.

"Well…" Ai can't object with that.

"Better be safe than sorry. We'll stay here as you said." Yusaku agrees. Kusanagi and Takeru also nods. There's no harm done since the room provided their daily needs.

Kazue is grateful for their understanding. She feels bad that this has to happen when they were supposed to have one more fun time before going back home. She'll compensate them by providing them with the best machines for Kusanagi's truck.

Living Room - Hibiki Research Facility - Outskirt of Den City

Kento thought he was ready to meet with the person or people sent by SOL Technologies. This won't be the first time after all, he had already met some of them several times since he was employed by Kazue's father. He thought he had gotten used to meeting them. Alas, he was sorely mistaken.

There are four people who came here.

First is Takahashi Matsumoto, the Chief of Science Department that he and Kazue met before when they visited SOL Technologies' main HQ.

Second is a tall and slim woman with brown eyes and glasses. She has shoulder-length strawberry-blond hair that she kept tied up in a bun. Her attire consisted of a black suit and pants with a white shirt underneath and a black ribbon.

Third is the lime-green haired young man he met when he got lost looking for Saint Kuriboh.

Last but not least, the person that Kento is the least happy to meet is Shion Amagi, the person he met together with his lime-green haired assistant when Kento was looking for Saint Kuriboh.

Kento still has a sense of discomfort when facing Shion. He feels terrible for having this kind of feeling even though he could tell that Shion is not a bad person. Why is he so wary of this guy while he doesn't feel the same with the others from SOL Technologies? Still, Kento tries his best not to show it on his face.

Now, they're facing each other, sitting on the sofa in the living room. Kazue takes the lead on the conversation, starting with how her father is going to arrive late due to an urgent matter, so she'll be the one to act as a guide for them until her father arrives. Fortunately, Matsumoto is not showing objection with Kazue guiding them despite her young age.

"I've seen what you're capable of when you came to visit last time, Kazue-kun. I trust that you'll guide us well." Matsumoto tells Kazue.

"Thank you, Matsumoto-san. Then, shall we go to the lab to look at our current android prototype?" Kazue proposes.

"That would be great. Let us go, Amagi. Eguchi, Toriumi, please wait here for us." Matsumoto instructs them as he stands up from the sofa, gesturing Shion to do the same.

Shion stands up without a word and follows Matsumoto and Kazue towards where the lab is, leaving Kento with their assistants. Kazue nods at Kento, trusting him to keep company the two assistants.

Kento knows that this would be an opportunity to pry some information from them. Fortunately, he's not facing Shion, so he feels more comfortable.

"I think we haven't introduced ourselves properly. My name is Kento Hijiri, I'm a freelance programmer currently employed by Hibiki Enterprise. It is a pleasure to meet you." Kento introduces himself politely.

"My name is Bashira Eguchi. I am Chief Matsumoto's personal assistant. It is nice to meet you, Hijiri-kun." The woman, Bashira, introduces herself.

"My name is Isamu Toriumi. I am Chief Amagi's personal assistant. It's been a while since we last met, Hijiri-kun." Isamu greets Kento, still remembering the boy.

"You've met before?" Bashira asks.

"Yes. When I visited SOL Technologies, I got lost when my pet robot ran away. Toriumi-san and Amagi-san helped me." Kento answers. This is a good start to a conversation. "Thank you for your help back then, Toriumi-san."

"It's nothing. I'm glad you found your pet robot. About that robot, did you make it yourself?" Isamu asks back, a bit curious.

"No. Kazue made it for me. I only helped a bit in its programming." Kento answers smoothly. It was half a lie. Kazue did make the robot as a container for Saint Kuriboh.

"Then, you're here to help with the android's programming?" Bashira asks this time, now interested to know the boy.

"Yes. I checked the prototype yesterday. It still needs a lot of work, but I think we are close in completing the android with more tweaks." Kento explains. This isn't a lie. He did check the android and helped with the programming before going to bed.

"You must be very diligent to develop a professional skill. You're still in high school, yet you already employed by the Enterprise." Bashira fixes her glasses as her attention to Kento sharpens, fully assessing the boy, which is obvious for the said boy.

"B-both of you are assistants for Matsumoto-san and Amagi-san. Does each chief have their own personal assistants?" Kento turns the subject to them, avoiding further questions towards him. Fortunately, it work out.

"Yes. There are three chiefs managing SOL Technologies. Chief of Science, Chief of Security, and Chief of Marketing." Bashira begins to explain. Her eyes glint upon hearing the question.

Kento listens carefully. It was a question that he asked reflexively, but he hopes this would be useful somehow for them.

According to Bashira, there are three chiefs responsible for managing SOL Technologies. And each chief

Chief of Science. This position is held by Takahashi Matsumoto. He oversees managing every project development within SOL Technologies. Every project submitted must first be checked and gained his approval before he delivers the proposal to the CEO.

Chief of Security. This position is held by Shion Amagi. He oversees SOL Technologies' security. The security system, the team working to maintain the security, everything is decided by him.

"But, what about Zaizen-san? Is he not in charge of security?" Kento asks. From what he heard, Akira has always been the one who's giving orders. The bounty hunter team also moves according to his direction.

"Manager Zaizen may have the command to the security team, but the formation of the team and the plan of operation that Manager Zaizen comes up with must receive approval from Chief Amagi." Isamu answers in Bashira's place, being Shion's assistant.

Isamu often meets Akira because of their respective position and connection to Shion. The Chief of Security has high expectations for Akira. There was a time he demoted Akira, but that was only because he followed the Queen's order. Afterwards, Shion reinstated him and once said that he is sure that Akira will eventually succeed in his position as the Chief of Security. And Isamu agrees. Akira Zaizen has proven himself more than competent in his job. Not to mention, he is very attentive to his subordinates, which makes Isamu envious of Hayami who works under him.

Lastly, Chief of Marketing. This position is held by Satoshi Mikami. He is in charge of marketing research and making the marketing plan to promote SOL Technologies' products. He often accompanies SOL Technologies' CEO, that's why he's hardly present. He also has his own personal assistant, whose name is Subaru Ogawa.

"Is that also why Mikami-san didn't come here today? Because he's busy attending the CEO's need?" Kento wonders since Matsumoto and Shion are the only ones who would meet them directly so far.

"Yes. They have a lot of work to do that even Ogawa, his assistant, must also come with him instead of coming here as his representative." Bashira says. Usually, when meeting their business partner, if the Chief is unable to be present, then they send their assistant to represent them, listening to and taking notes of the meeting.

"Is it difficult? Working as assistants I mean." Kento asks, trying to keep the conversation running without being directed at him. At his question though, Bashira's face frowns, her gaze briefly flashes to the stiffen Isamu before looking back at Kento.

"Hijiri-kun, you shouldn't-" Bashira is already late to stop the question coming out from Kento's mouth.

"It's hell." Isamu says, surprising Kento and makes Bashira sigh while covering her face with her hand.

"Chief Amagi… He sometimes likes to ditch his work to me and when he's in a bad mood he challenges me to a Duel with training as an excuse to beat me up. Just trying to keep with him is exhausting because he's freakishly strong. Also, he loves weird-tasting food and always shoves it into my mouth for taste-testing first. He has no idea how to go easy on someone!" As if a switch has been turned on, Isamu starts to ramble his exasperation that he has

"I'm sorry, Hijiri-kun. But please refrain from asking him about his duty next time. He has… some pent-up frustrations." Bashira internally shakes her head at Isamu's behavior, feeling shameful for her inability to stop Isamu and Isamu's non-stop complaints, which is improper and unprofessional for someone of his position.

" *Some? More like a lot."* Kento thinks silently, sweat dropping at the Chief of Security who looks like he is on the verge of tears. He genuinely feels sorry for Isamu, "Isn't that a problem? It's like a workplace harassment, right?"

Contrary to Kento's expectations, Isamu quickly straightens up himself and smiles embarassedly, "Well, about that… Despite everything I said, I wouldn't want to be anywhere else. There were times I wished I had a nicer boss and everything…"

Isamu's expression gradually turns determined.

"But I respect Chief Amagi. When he puts his mind to it, he never skips out even the smallest details. He never skips his training either, always polishing his skill both as the Chief of Security and as a Duelist. It's hard to keep that mindset. If that's the example he's setting, I can endure some unreasonableness." Isamu admits, genuine admiration and respect are clear in both his expression and tone, as if all the rambling he did never happened.

"Oh, and thanks to him training me, I do have to admit that I've grown much stronger. Plus, he is very nice towards children and animals." To his surprise, the chief he is assisting has soft spot for children and animals. He still remembered how, during one of his

weekends, he was gawking when he saw his superior was playing basketball with children at the park and then helping take care of an injured dog that belonged to one of the children. It was purely a coincidence he came across that scene. He never told this to Shion himself though. He had a feeling that he'd lose his neck if he ever told him.

"Then you two do get along. He must be an amazing person despite his personality." Seeing the expressions Isamu was making, Kento can tell that Isamu was only telling facts without any deceit. That the Chief of Security is truly not a bad person.

" *Why do I feel that way towards him then?"* Kento wonders if something is wrong with him. When he's near Shion, he has the feeling that he's looking at him over and possibly judging him. Did he instinctively figure he was a higher-up of SOL Technologies and that's why he became wary? And learning he is the Chief of Security increases his discomfort?

" *Wait…"* Kento blinks, realizing something.

Shion is the Chief of Security and Akira's superior. The formation of the security team and planning are approved by him. That means he has a hand in the formation of the bounty hunters' team and approve of people assigned to capture the Ignis and steal the Divine Deck.

That means…

[INTRUDER ALERT]

A shrill, high-pitched buzzing startles Kento, Isamu, and Bashira that the three of them instantly stand up from the sofa.

"I-intruder?!" Bashira looks at their surroundings nervously after being alerted by the alarm.

[INTRUDER ALERT]

"No. This alarm alerts that someone is breaching this facility's security system." Kento tries his best to stay composed and calms down the two assistants who are with him. Yusaku and the others must be surprised as well. Fortunately, Kazue already had someone ready to explain things to their friends waiting in the guest room.

BRRRRRRRR

He feels his phone vibrating in his pocket shirt. He quickly takes out his phone and answers the call, already knowing who's calling him without having to see the name shown on the screen.

"Kazue! What's happening?!" Kento asks immediately.

"There's someone breaking through our security system!" Kazue answers from the other side of the phone, "Kento, please help our technicians to stop the intruder online. I'll be there too."

"Got it!" Kento ends the phone call and then faces the two assistants. "I'm sorry, but I must go help with the security system. Please follow our staff's direction."

Kento hurriedly goes to the computer room, entrusting Isamu and Bashira to one of the staff on standby for their safety.

Computer Room - Hibiki Research Facility

When Kento arrived at the room, everybody already had their hands full with the intruder breaking through their security system. Kento takes one of the empty seats and starts working on the facility's system.

The intruder already broke through the firewall. In response to this, Kento and everyone else activates the defense program in all ten layers of the system. But not too long after they activated it, the program is cracked as the intruder proceeds. The fact that it was

cracked almost immediately after the program was activated means that there's someone from the outside who assists the intruder.

" *We're dealing with two people… !"* Kento grits his teeth. The hacker who cracked the defense was no joke either. No amateur or average-level hacker can break the defense program so quickly. They might be even more skilled than he is.

It's already annoying enough to have to deal with SOL Technologies during their break, and now they're dealing with intruders. Yesterday and today were supposed to be the time they could play to their hearts' content while deepening their bonds. Whoever these intruders are, he won't let them get away so easily. They're going to pay for ruining their long-awaited break.

Kazue then comes in.

But she goes straight to a door on the other side of the room. Kento doesn't question her. He knows what she's planning to do if she's going into that room. In that case, his job is to delay the intruder for as long as possible before they reach the facility's database.

"I'm leaving the rest to you, Kazue."

Hibiki Research Facility Server - Network

Once Kazue entered the small room inside the computer room, she quickly logged online. The room she entered was not an ordinary room. It's a special room that had been designed to prevent outside interference. She won't have to worry logging in from this room. And it's better for her to log in instead of Kento since Holysaber was already widely known in Den City. If he appears here to protect the database, SOL Technologies would suspect that he has a connection with Hibiki Enterprise. Kento is aware of this. That's why he didn't say anything when Kazue entered the room and instead focused on recovering the security system.

The database of the facility has the appearance of a spacious white room with walls showing digital displays of document symbols pertaining to their projects. There is a decoration on the ceiling made of clockwork, and the "desktop" within the digital display features a swinging pendulum. There is also a row of futuristic candlesticks and pillars. Across from where Ryuki is standing is a big white door.

The door then starts to open.

The intruder has arrived.

Ryuki's eyes widen at the sight of the intruder entering the room, fully revealing herself.

She has pink hair and wears a long flamboyant dress of green and jade blended colors with white edge cuff-lines, half pull-up sleeves up to beneath the lower shoulder and wrist, and a collar cloth. She also wears braids around her left leg, thigh-high stockings, dark-brown string tie shoes, a thin jewel-line necklace and blossom bud ornament on the right side of her head. Her face is entirely covered by a golden Thalia mask.

This isn't the first time someone has tried to steal Hibiki Enterprise's data. However, the intruder in front of her looks different from all the previous intruders. She is not scary-looking or mean-looking like the other brutes. Beautiful in fact. But despite not doing anything, Ryuki feels an invisible pressure coming from her. She radiates a hostile presence that exalts herself rather than imposing intimidation upon her.

Regardless, Ryuki is not the type to judge by looks alone.

"Are you the one who made a mess of our security program?" Ryuki questions her.

"It is an honor to meet thee. Chloris is my name." The intruder, Chloris, raises the hem of her skirt up as she bows, formally greeting Ryuki. "Naught have I against Hibiki Enterprise. However, my master

is interested in this project thy art working on. Thus, I came to retrieve thine data."

Not only appearance, but her manner of speaking is also unusual, very much unlike the previous intruders.

"I know thou hast no intention to give thine data freely. Therefore, I challenge thee to a Duel." Chloris activates her Duel Disk.

"It doesn't look like you're a mere petty thief hired by a rival company." Ryuki narrows her eyes. People aiming for

Ryuki activates her Duel Disk, forming the field for both her and her opponent, beginning the Master Duel.

"Duel!"

Ryuki LP: 4000

Chloris LP: 4000

"I shall take the first turn. I activate Field Spell: Aroma Garden." Chloris activates a Field Spell, changing the pure white floor into a grassy green field, decorated with bushes and various kinds of colorful flowers.

"From mine hand, I summon Aromage Jasmine." Chloris summons Aromage Jasmine to the Main Monster Zone in Attack Position.

Aromage Jasmine (PLANT/LIGHT/EFFECT/ATK: 100/DEF: 1900/LV: 2)

"At this moment, Aroma Garden's effect is activated. Once per turn, if I control Aroma monster, I gain 500 LP, and all my monsters gains 500 ATK and DEF until the end of my opponent's next turn." Chloris reveals, increasing her LP and Aromage Jasmine's ATK and DEF by 500.

Chloris LP: 4000 = 4500

Aromage Jasmine ATK & DEF: 100 & 1900 = 600 & 2400

"When I gain LP, Aromage Jasmine's effect activates. Once per turn, I can Draw 1 card. And during mine Main Phase, whilst mine LP art higher than my opponent's, I can Normal Summon 1 Plant monster in addition to my Normal Summon or Set." Chloris draws one card from the top of her Deck before she turns to Aromage Jasmine.

"I Release Aromage Jasmine to Advance Summon Aromage Bergamot." Chloris Advance Summons Aromage Bergamot in Attack Position to the zone there Aromage Jasmine used to, with his ATK and DEF increased due to Aroma Garden's effect.

Aromage Bergamot (PLANT/FIRE/EFFECT/ATK: 2900/DEF: 2300/LV: 6)

"If my LP is higher than mine opponent's, I can Special Summon Aromage Laurier from mine hand." Chloris summons Aromage Laurier to the zone next to Bergamot in Attack Position, with her ATK and DEF increased due to Aroma Garden's effect.

Aromage Laurier (PLANT/EARTH/EFFECT/ATK: 1300/DEF: 500/LV: 1)

"Bloom, the circuit of spring and magic!" Chloris summons the Link Portal to her field in front of her.

"Arrowheads confirmed. The summoning condition is 2 Plant Monsters. I set Lauriel and Bergamot on the Link Markers. Circuits combined." Chloris sets Lauriel to the Bottom-Right Link Marker and Bergamot to the Bottom-Left Link Marker.

"Link Summon! Come forth, Link 2, Aromaseraphy Jasmine!" Chloris summons her Link Monster to the Extra Monster Zone, with her ATK increased due to Aroma Garden's effect.

Aromaseraphy Jasmine (PLANT/LIGHT/LINK/ATK: 2300/LM: Bottom-Right, Bottom-Left/LNK: 2)

"When Laurier is sent to the Graveyard, I gain 500 LP." Chloris increases her LP again by 500.

Chloris LP: 4500 = 5000

"If mine LP is higher than my opponent's, I can Special Summon Aromage Laurier from mine hand." Chloris summons a second copy of Laurier to the zone pointed by Aromaseraphy Jasmine's Bottom-Right Link Arrow in Attack Position, with her ATK and DEF increased due to Aroma Garden's effect.

Aromage Laurier (PLANT/EARTH/EFFECT/ATK: 1300/DEF: 500/LV: 1)

"I activate Aromaseraphy Jasmine's effect. I can Release the Plant monster pointed by this card to Special Summon 1 Plant monster from mine Deck in Defense Position." Chloris Releases Laurier that she just summoned to Special Summon Aromage Rosemary in Defense Position in Laurier's place, with her ATK and DEF increased due to Aroma Garden's effect.

Aromage Rosemary (PLANT/WATER/EFFECT/ATK: 2300/DEF: 1000/LV: 4)

"I set a card and end mine turn." Chloris finishes her turn.

A Field Spell that once per turn increases Chloris' LP and her two monsters' ATK and DEF until her next turn. Chloris' two monsters will be in their powered-up state for three turns in total starting from the first turn. 500 LP increase per turn is quite concerning because if it keeps continuing, not only will Chloris' LP be higher than hers that it makes it difficult to deplete it, but it'll also trigger the activation of the effect of her monsters.

It'll be more favorable if Ryuki can destroy her Field Spell. Unfortunately, it's not possible at the moment because she doesn't have the necessary card in her hand. That leaves her to use another way that she has with her current cards.

"My turn. When my opponent controls a monster while I'm not, I can Special Summon Hieroglyphic Dragon - Tfeni Dragon from my hand." Ryuki summons Tfeni in Attack Position to the Main Monster Zone.

Hieroglyphic Dragon - Tfeni Dragon (DRAGON/LIGHT/EFFECT/ATK: 2100/DEF: 1400/LV: 6)

"By Releasing a Hieroglyphic monster, I can Special Summon Hieroglyphic Dragon - Shiyu Dragon from my hand." Ryuki summons Shiyu to the zone next to Tfeni in Attack Position.

Hieroglyphic Dragon - Shiyu Dragon (DRAGON/LIGHT/EFFECT/ATK: 2200/DEF: 1000/LV: 6)

"When Tfeni Dragon is Released, I can Special Summon 1 Dragon Normal Monster from my hand." Ryuki summons Guardragon Justicia in Attack Position to the zone next to Shiyu.

Guardragon Justicia (DRAGON/WATER/NORMAL/ATK: 0/DEF: 2100/LV: 2)

"From my hand, I summon Hieroglyphic Dragon - Dragon Geiv." Ryuki Normal Summons Geiv to the zone next to Justicia in Attack Position.

Hieroglyphic Dragon - Dragon Geiv (DRAGON/LIGHT/EFFECT/ATK: 1800/DEF: 400/LV: 4)

"Appear, the circuit of protectors!" Ryuki opens the Link Portal, Setting Tfeni to the Bottom-Right Link Marker and Shiyu to the Bottom-Left Link Marker, combining the circuit.

"Link Summon! Appear, Link 2, Hieroglyphic Seal of the Celestial Spheres!" Ryuki summons Celestial Spheres to the Extra Monster Zone in Attack Position.

Hieroglyphic Seal of the Celestial Spheres (DRAGON/LIGHT/LINK/ATK: 0/LM: Bottom-Right, Bottom-Left/LNK: 2)

"For the second time, the circuit of protectors!" Ryuki Sets Justicia to the Left Link Marker.

"Link Summon! Appear, Link 1, Guardragon Elpy!" Ryuki summons Elpy to the zone pointed by Celestial Spheres's Bottom-Right Link Arrow in the Main Monster Zone.

Guardragon Elpy (DRAGON/DARK/LINK/ATK: 1000/LM: Left/LNK: 1)

"For the third time! The circuit of protectors!" This time, Ryuki Sets Pisty to the Right Link Marker, Setting Elpy to the Right Link Marker.

"Link Summon! Appear, Link 1, Guardragon Pisty!" Ryuki summons Elpy to the zone pointed Celestial Sphere's Bottom-Left Link Arrow in the Main Monster Zone.

Guardragon Pisty (DRAGON/DARK/LINK/ATK: 1000/LV: Right/LNK: 1)

"I activate Guardragon Elpy's effect. During my Main Phase, I can Special Summon 1 Dragon Monster from my hand of Deck to the zone pointed by 2 or more Link Monsters. "Two-headed dragon who commands the wind, ascend and blow away the fog that led people astray! Come forth, Guardragon Andrake!" Ryuki summons Andrake from her Deck to the zone pointed by Elpy and Pisty's Link Arrows.

Guardragon Andrake (DRAGON/WIND/EFFECT/ATK: 2000/DEF: 600/LV: 4)

"When Guardragon Andrake is Special Summoned from hand or Deck, I can double this card's original ATK and DEF until the end of the next turn." Ryuki doubles Andrake's ATK and DEF.

Guardragon Andrake ATK & DEF: 2000 & 600 = 4000 & 1200

"I activate Magic Card: Dragon's Trade. I banish three Dragon monsters in my Graveyard and draw three cards." Ryuki banishes Tfeni, Geiv, and Shiyu from her Graveyard and then draws three cards from the top of her Deck.

"Battle! I attack Aromaseraphy Jasmine with Andrake!" Ryuki declares her Battle Phase.

Andrake spread its wings. The gem on its chest glowed brightly, filling the two-headed dragon with energies sparkling like gemstones. The winds gathered around Andrake in whirlwind motion.

Seconds before Andrake could open its wings, Chloris opens her Reverse Card.

"Trap Card: Aroma Healing. I gain 1000 LP for each Aroma monster with a different name." Chloris controls Jasmine and Rosemary, so she gains 2000 LP in total. White magic cirlce is formed above Chloris, showering her with white sparks that increases her LP.

Chloris LP: 5000 = 7000

"At this moment, I activate Aromage Rosemary's effect. Once per turn, if I gain LP, I can change the battle position of 1 monster on the field." Chloris points to the incoming Guardragon Andrake. Rosemary raises her wand and then knocks it down, summoning a big water bubble that traps Andrake, immobilizing the dragon back to its place before the bubble pops out, dropping the now drenched dragon to Defense Position.

" *Cancelling my attack by forcing Andrake to Defense Position. This is not good. Andrake's DEF is lower than any of her monsters, and so does my Link Monsters' ATKs."* Ryuki knows that the next turn won't be pretty for her.

"And then, I activate Aromaseraphy Jasmine's effect. Once per turn, if I gain LP, I can add 1 Plant monster from mine Deck to my hand." Chloris adds one Aroma Monster to her hand.

"I set two cards and end my turn." Ryuki finishes her turn.

As Chloris begins her turn, due to Aroma Garden's effect, Chloris' LP is increased by 500.

Chloris LP: 7000 = 7500

"I change Rosemary to Attack Position." Ryuki changes Rosemary's previously defensive position to offensive.

"I activate Aroma Healing's effect from mine Graveyard. I can banish it to Special Summon 1 Aroma monster in the Graveyard and Special Summon it and gain 500 LP." Chloris revives Bergamot in Attack Position to the zone pointed by Jasmine's Bottom-Left Arrow along with an additional 500 LP for her.

Chloris LP: 7500 = 8000

Aromage Bergamot ATK & DEF: 2400 & 1800 = 2900 & 2300

"I also activate Aromage Bergamot's effect. When I gain LP, 'tis card gains 1000 ATK and DEF until the end of my opponent's turn." Chloris reveals. Bergamot raises his wand, powering up his ATK and DEF at the same time.

Aromage Bergamot ATK & DEF: 2900 & 2300 = 3900 & 3300

"Battle! I attack Guardragon Andrake with Bergamot!" Chloris declares her Battle Phase.

Bergamot points his staff towards Andrake, forming a large fire ball and shoots it at the weakened dragon.

"While my LP is higher than my opponent's while I control this card, when a Plant-Type monster I control attacks a Defense Position

monster, I can inflict piercing battle damage. And due to Rosemary's effect, my opponent cannot activate monster effects until the end of damage step!" Chloris reveals.

Ryuki tenses up, not expecting the effect. Chloris changed Andrake into Defense Position not just to stop her attack, but also so that she can destroy Andrake while still inflicting damage.

Still, though an unexpected move, Ryuki won't let Chloris have her way.

"I activate Quick-Play Spell: Dragonic Preservation! I can choose a Dragon monster I control, that Dragon monster cannot be affected by my opponent's monster effect until the end of this turn!" Ryuki activates one of the three cards she has drawn. She picks Celestial Sphere, protecting the dragon from Rosemary's monster effect negation, and thus, allows Ryuki to use the dragon's effect.

"I activate Celestial Sphere's effect! Once per opponent's turn, if this card is in the Extra Monster Zone, I can Release 1 monster from my hand or field; and return 1 face-up card on the field to the hand!" Ryuki Release Celestial Sphere and then return Andrake back to her hand.

Ryuki is fully aware that she'd still suffer huge damage from this, but this damage is lesser than if she kept Celestial Sphere with 0 ATK in her field. Had she insisted on keeping Celestial Sphere, her life would've ended.

"Then, I attack Guardragon Elpy !" Chloris shifts her target to Elpy. The fireball thrown by Bergamot shifts direction towards one of the remaining two dragons. The flame covers the dragon's entire body, incinerating it until not even its ashes remains.

Ryuki LP: 4000 = 1300

"Ugh… !" Ryuki holds her ground as the blow from her monster's destruction pushes her. She straightens herself before pointing at

one of her Reverse cards.

"Trap Card: Dragon Aid! When my dragon monster is destroyed by Battle, I can Special Summon a Level 5 or higher Dragon Monster from my hand and until the end of this turn, my opponent can only attack that Dragon monster and it cannot be destroyed!" Ryuki summons Aset Dragon in Attack Position.

Hieroglyphic Dragon - Aset Dragon (DRAGON/LIGHT/EFFECT/ATK: 1900/DEF: 1200/LV: 5)

"But thou still receive damage." Chloris reminds the dragon user as she orders Aromage Rosemary to attack next. The blue-dressed Aromage monster lit up the candle of her staff and moves her staff in a dancing motion, forming dozens of butterfly-shaped waters that assault the purple-skin dragon.

Ryuki LP: 1100 = 900

And lastly, Chloris attacks with Aromaseraphy Jasmine, who summons a storm of white flowers, cutting Aset Dragon's body with its sharp petals.

Ryuki LP: 900 = 500

"Turn end." Chloris concludes.

Kento watches the Duel with other staff worriedly. The intruder was stronger than he expected. To think that Kazue would be cornered like this. A skilled hacker and a powerful Duelists, a dangerous combination to have as enemies. He wants to log in and help her at any moment now, but there'll be a big consequence if Holysaber appears, especially when there are people of SOL Technologies here.

" *Wait… That's right. I still have my Tsurugi avatar. If I use that avatar, then I can…"* Just as Kento contemplates that and ready to

log in to help,

"How is the situation?"

Matsumoto comes in together with Bashira, asking the situation at hand.

"Matsumoto-san?! Weren't you escorted out?!" Kento asks in surprise.

"I don't think it's right for me to stay still. This also concerns our side. It'd be troublesome if the intruder steals the data of our joint project." Matsumoto reasons. Kento can't refute that.

"Where are Amagi-san and Toriumi-san?" Kento asks, expecting that the Chief of Security and his assistant also follows them, but they're nowhere to be seen.

"They're relaying the situation to our CEO. It just so happens she's calling us to hear the update of our progress." Matsumoto answers before looking at the screen that shows Ryuki Dueling against the intruder.

"Is this Ryuki fighting for us? She's in a difficult situation." Matsumoto asks.

"As long as she still has LP, she can still fight." Kento says firmly. He'll bet on the little chance that Ryuki has even if it seems hopeless.

"Ms. Ryuki, won't thee surrender?" Chloris asks Ryuki. "'Tis dost not need to end in a painful way."

Ryuki looks at Chloris incredulously. Shockingly, when Chloris asked, it wasn't said as mockery or sarcasm. She is sincerely asking out of concern for her well-being. What kind of thief she is to go as far as showing sympathy to the person getting in her way. Perhaps she's

actually a nice person but is forced to steal their database? Or is there another reason she's hiding?

"You said that your master wants to see the data stored here. For what purpose?" Ryuki asks. It won't a change a thing regardless of her answer, but Ryuki couldn't help wanting to know.

"I'm sorry. But even I know not of mine master's intention. He gives me the order and I obey." Chloris answers.

It doesn't look like Chloris was lying. She's truly clueless of whatever her master is planning after stealing their data. From the way she referred to her master, she's not someone who is hired only for one time like most intruders Ryuki encountered. From the way she spoke of this master of hers, she's doing this out of pure unquestionable loyalty. It's difficult to discern whether Chloris belongs to a rival company or a small group that likes to cause mischief.

Nevertheless, Ryuki won't concede. She cannot. It's unlike her Duel against Soulburner, the stake of this Duel is big. If she lost, her father's company would suffer. Even though she knows her father wouldn't blame her should the worst happen, losing is not an option that she would take. Everybody in the enterprise worked hard to create all these projects. She won't let all their hard work becomes nothing.

"Thou art strong. Even in 'tis situation, thou still continue to fight. Mine master would be pleased." Chloris smiles softly at Ryuki.

"Your master would be pleased? Why?" Ryuki inquires. Chloris' master knew her? Does that mean that the person behind this is someone she had met before?

"That is only mine master can tell thou." Chloris shakes her head.

"Very well. I'll have to drag your master out by defeating you. My turn. Draw!" Ryuki begins her turn. She looks at the card she drew, the card she has in her hand, and then the field.

" *There is a way to win by taking advantage of Chloris' monsters… But that all depends on how Chloris will play her next turn…"* Ryuki is a bit nervous. But it's not like she has any other choice than with the cards available in her hand and field.

She must take this small chance in front of her. Now or never.

"I activate Magic Card: Hieroglyphic Seal of Supremacy. I can Special Summon 1 Hieroglyphic Monster from my hand." Ryuki summons Hieroglyphic Seal of the God Dragon to the Main Monster Zone in Attack Position.

Hieroglyphic Seal of the God Dragon (DRAGON/LIGHT/NORMAL/ATK: 0/DEF: 0/LV: 8)

"I activate Aset Dragon's effect. Once per turn, I can target 1 face-up Dragon Normal Monster on the field and then change the Levels of all face-up Hieroglyphic monsters currently on the field become the Level of that monster until the End Phase." Ryuki targets Seal of the God Dragon's Level, changing Aset Dragon's Level to the same as Seal of the God Dragon.

Hieroglyphic Dragon - Aset Dragon LV: 5 = 8

"I Overlay Level 8 Seal of the Dragon God and Level 8 Aset!"

Ryuki holds out both of her arms, palms flat and facing downward representing two monsters that she declares, before placing her hands over one another, causing her Duel Disk to shine and yellow-colored sparks shoots above her, opening the Overlay Network. Seal of the God Dragon and Aset became particles of data and enters nodes on the Overlay Network. Energy flows in four beams past Ryuki creating a portal in front of her from which her Xyz Monster emerge.

"Xyz Summon! Appear, Rank 8, Hieroglyphic Heavenly Dragon - Ennead!" Ryuki summons Ennead to the Extra Monster Zone in Attack Position.

Hieroglyphic Heavenly Dragon - Ennead
(DRAGON/LIGHT/XYZ/ATK: 3000/DEF: 2400/ORU: 2/RNK: 8)

"Battle! I attack Aromaseraphy Jasmine with Ennead!" Ryuki immediately declares her Battle Phase.

Following her declaration, Ennead shot a stream of fiery purplish red blast from its mouth straight towards the Aroma Link Monster.

"Aromaseraphy Jasmine's effect! If mine LP is higher than my opponent's, 'tis card and any Plant monsters it points to cannot be destroyed by battle." Chloris exclaims, directing her Link Monster to form a barrier of flower to protect them from the dragon's blast.

"But you still take damage!" Ryuki reminds the Aroma user.

The blast pushes back Chloris and her monster, almost causing Chloris to lose her footing from the impact, but she manages to keep standing.

Chloris LP: 8000 = 7300

"I set a card and end my turn." Ryuki concludes, surprising everyone.

"Thee just ends thy turn? Surely you jest?" Chloris questions Ryuki's decision to finish her turn with just that one attack. She thought that Ryuki would do more. But seeing Ryuki doesn't answer her question, she has no intention to do more.

Chloris doubts that Ryuki has given up. The blaze in Ryuki's eyes doesn't diminish. She's planning to Duel to the end. But what can she do with her current situation?

With the end of Ryuki's second turn, Aroma Garden's effect also ends, reverting Chloris' monsters' ATKs and DEFs to normal.

Aromage Bergamot ATK & DEF: 3900 & 3300 = 2400 & 1800

Aromaseraphy Jasmine ATK: 2300 = 1800

Aromage Rosemary ATK & DEF: 2300 & 1200 = 1800 & 700

However, the return of the ATK and DEF numbers is only brief. Just as Chloris begins her turn, Aroma Garden's effect once again increases the Aroma monsters' ATKs and DEFs along with Chloris' LP.

Chloris LP: 7300 = 7800

Aromaseraphy Jasmine ATK: 1800 = 2300

Aromage Rosemary ATK & DEF: 1800 & 700 = 2300 & 1200

Aromage Bergamot ATK & DEF: 2400 & 1800 = 2900 & 2300

"I activate Aromage Bergamot's effect. When I gain LP, this card gains 1000 ATK and DEF until the end of my opponent's turn." Chloris reveals. Bergamot raises his wand, powering up his ATK and DEF at the same time.

Aromage Bergamot ATK & DEF: 2900 & 2300 = 3900 & 3300

"At this moment, I activate Aromage Rosemary's effect. Once per turn, if I gain LP, I can change the battle position of 1 monster on the field." Chloris changes Ennead's battle position to Defense like she did with Andrake in the previous turns.

Watching from the real world, Kento is confused. Ryuki could've used Ennead's effect to negate Aromage Rosemary's effect and then destroy it. Why did she just let Ennead to be on Defense despite knowing Aromage Bergamot's piercing damage inflicting effect?

"'Tis is thy end! I attack Ennead with Aromage Bergamot!" Chloris declares her attack immediately. Bergamot prepares his fire ball again following his master's command.

However, in that moment, Ryuki opens one of her Reverse Cards.

"Trap Card: Staunch Defender! When my opponent declares an attack, I can target 1 face-up monster on my field. During this turn, my opponent can only attack that monster and my opponent must attack that monster with all their face-up monsters!" Ryuki reveals her first Trap, choosing Ennead as her target, making the Xyz dragon the sole target of this attack until the end of this turn.

"What?!" Chloris is shocked beyond belief.

Everyone who is watching the Duel in the real world is equally shocked.

"Ryuki only has 500 LP left. Ennead only has 2400 DEF while Bergamot has 3900 ATK. She won't survive 1500 damage that would be inflicted. Why would she bother activating that Trap?" Matsumoto wonders out loud in bewilderment.

"Has she lost it?" Bashira deduces.

"No." Kento interjects, staring at Ryuki with unbreakable faith. "She must have a plan."

"I activate Dragon's Aid's effect from my Graveyard! I banish this card and a Dragon Monster from the Graveyard to increase the ATK and DEF of a Dragon Monster I control equal to the banished monster's ATK and DEF until the end of this turn!" Ryuki banishes Dragon's Aid together with Guardragon Justicia, increasing Ennead's ATK by 0 and DEF by 2100, equal to the latter dragon's ATK and DEF.

Hieroglyphic Heavenly Dragon - Ennead ATK & DEF: 3000 & 2400 = 3000 & 4500

"DEF of 4500?!" Chloris gasps at the sudden turn of event.

"If I cannot defeat you by destroying your monsters and cannot attack because you force me into Defense… Then I'll have you destroy yourself." Ryuki tells Chloris. Her plan is a success.

Kento smiles as he figures out Ryuki's intention.

She expected Chloris to use Rosemary's effect to change Ennead into Defense Position so that she can inflict bigger damage due to Ennead's DEF is lower than its ATK. Ryuki takes advantage of that switch to instead inflict bigger damage on Chloris by forcing all her monsters to attack Ennead whose DEF became higher than their ATKs thanks to Dragon's Aid's effect.

" *Excellent, Ryuki!"* Kento cheers internally.

Bergamot throws his fireball at Ennead, but the dragon reflects the fireball back with a flap of its wings, blasting back Bergamot and Chloris together.

Chloris LP: 7800 = 7200

Rosemary summons her water butterflies to swarm at Ennead. However, much like Bergamot's fireball, Ennead flaps its wings to unleash a powerful blow of wind, blowing away the butterflies and almost sending Chloris flying.

Chloris LP: 7200 = 5000

Lastly, Aromaseraphy Jasmine unleashes her floral storm, but again, Ennead deflects the storm with a single swing of its wings, dispersing the flowery storm.

Chloris LP: 5000 = 2800

Chloris stares dumbfoundedly at Ryuki. She's speechless. She was so close to winning, confident that all she needed was to deliver the finishing blow, but Ryuki defies her expectations by turning the tide

to her favor by taking advantage of her own combo. It's hard to believe…

"*… Yet it's amazing…"* Chloris looks at Ryuki in astonishment.

"I end my turn." Chloris concludes. She briefly closes her eyes. She knows what's going to come next. Despite her impending outcome, she's not upset.

Following the end of Chloris' turn, Ennead's ATK and DEF turn to normal.

Hieroglyphic Heavenly Dragon - Ennead ATK & DEF: 3000 & 4500 = 3000 & 2400

"My turn. I change Ennead to Attack Position." Ryuki changes back Ennead's battle position to offensive. She's not going to waste any more time. She will put an end to this now.

"Battle! I attack Aromage Rosemary with Ennead!" Ryuki declares her first attack.

Ennead shoots a stream of purplish flame from its mouth, burning the Aromage monster.

Chloris LP: 2800 = 700

"At this moment, I activate Trap Card: Dragon's Rebirth! I target 1 Dragon monster I control and banish it to Special Summon 1 Dragon monster from my hand or Graveyard!" Ryuki opens her Reverse Card, banishing Pisty.

With her current situation, she actually didn't really need to activate this Trap. She'll still win by having Pisty deliver the finishing blow. However, she doesn't feel it's right to end this without her ace monster.

"Appear once more, Andrake!" Ryuki summons back Andrake that she returned to her hand in the previous turn. Since it was Special

Summoned from hand through a card effect, Andrake's ATK is doubled.

Guardragon Andrake ATK: 2000 = 4000

"Go, Andrake! Serpentine Squall!" Ryuki declares her final attack.

Andrake spread its wings. The gem on its chest glowed brightly, filling the two-headed dragon with energies sparkling like gemstones. The winds gathered around Andrake in whirlwind motion until the dragon's wings closed momentarily before spreading it wide open along with a roar, sending gust of winds at Aromaseraphy Jasmine, blowing away the Aroma Link Monster along with Chloris.

Chloris LP: 700 = 0

Both Duelists' Duel Disk deactivates following the end of the Duel. Chloris is kneeling on the floor; her body still trembles from the impact of the final blow. Ryuki is also shaking, but it doesn't take long for her to recover. Ryuki walks towards Chloris, ready to interrogate the intruder's identity…

"Look out!"

Ryuki gasps when someone suddenly pushes her down. Just as her body hits the floor, there's an explosion coming from the wall on their side. The person who pushed her is still holding her down protectively until the shaking stops. She looks at the person who protected her and is surprised to see who it was.

Knight.

The Duelist whom she saw fighting against Holysaber just a few days ago when they were on their way to Windy's world.

" *Knight… !"* Kento tenses up at Knight's appearance.

"Another intruder?!" One of the staff looks at Knight on screen warily.

"Rest assured. He is one of our men." Matsumoto calmly tells the staff. This brings relief to them, knowing that their boss' daughter is in safe hands.

Kento looks at Matsumoto suspiciously and then back at Knight who helps Ryuki stand up.

"You're…" Ryuki looks at Knight uncomfortably despite her feeling of gratitude towards the latter.

"I will explain later. We must first deal with them." Knight turns to the direction where Chloris is.

The thick smoke from the explosion momentarily covers Chloris' form. When Ryuki gets a hold of her vision, she sees two silhouettes behind the smoke. One is Chloris. The other one is…

When the smoke disperses, the other figure is revealed to be none other than the Duelist that Ryuki had met before. That prosthetic arm and that golden mask. She remembers clearly a Duelist with those features. That Duelist left too much of an impression to be forgotten.

It's the mysterious assailant that she and Kento encountered in the ruins of the Cyberse World where they first met Ai, Saint Kuriboh, and Linkuriboh.

"You're from before… !" Ryuki finally utters as she recognizes him.

"You know him?" Knight asks, looking at the new intruder and then back at Ryuki.

"Sort of. We only met once before. I don't know anything about him." Ryuki answers without removing her gaze from the mysterious assailant who attacked her and Kento before. To think he is affiliated with Chloris. And if he is here, a partner-in-crime of Chloris, that means the master Chloris talked about was the same person as the one behind the mysterious assailant.

The mysterious assailant takes Chloris by her hand and shoulder, helping her back to her feet. He then faces Knight and Ryuki, who seem more than ready to fight him. He raises his left arm in response, but Chloris holds his arm back down.

"Forebear, Ganymede. 'Twas unfortunate but it is a loss. Hie withdraw." Chloris tells him. It would spell a disaster if they keep staying here for long with the situation against them. They must return to their master and report their failure.

"Understood." Ganymede replies, relenting to Chloris' instruction.

He shoots the ceiling above with his prosthetic hand, opening a hole for both him and Chloris to escape using their D-Boards. To make sure Ryuki and Knight won't follow them so quickly, Ganymede shoots more parts of the ceiling, causing the ceiling to fall, stopping Ryuki and Knight from chasing them as they're busy avoiding the fallen debris above them.

"Wait!" Ryuki intends to stop them from escaping by following them with her D-Board, but Knight holds her back, holding her by the arm.

"It's too late. And there's no telling what will happen if we leave the security system like this." Knight tells her, reminding her that restoring the security system to protect the database is her main priority.

Ryuki is reluctant, but he is right. All that matters is that she stopped them from stealing the data stored here. It's possible that they'd be back, so she must make sure they not only restore but also reinforce the security system and defense program. The intruders are far stronger than the intruders they had ever encountered previously. They must double their efforts in their protection.

Kento watches Knight. He appears here under Matsumoto's order while Shion and Isamu are outside. Even if SOL Technologies informed the CEO about this attack, there's no way they could send

a Duelist within a short time, even through the network. Not with how far the distance between this facility and Den City. That means, Knight must be nearby, in the perimeter. Or to be precise, inside this facility. Right at this moment.

" *I'll make this clear for you, so you won't misunderstand. I am not a bounty hunter. Let's just say that I am one of high executives of SOL Technologies."*

A high executive of SOL Technologies who participates in capturing the Ignis and Divine Deck who is not part of the bounty hunters' team but has the privilege to take part in that mission. People who participate in the hunt must receive approval from the Chief of Security, the one in charge of SOL Technologies' security team.

Everything fits.

There's no doubt in Kento's mind.

Shion Amagi is Knight.

Unknown Domain - LINK VRAINS

"You failed, Chloris."

Chloris and Ganymede are standing behind a figure hiding in the curtain of the window, watching the fake moon illuminating the dark sky of LINK VRAINS.

"My apologies." Chloris apologizes, bowing her head down.

"It was just something I wanted to see out of curiosity rather than necessity. But I appreciate your effort. You did well." The figure thanks her for her work, still admiring the moon above. "If our current plan progress smoothly, we wouldn't need the backup plan."

"How is Ryuki? You Dueled her, correct?" The figure asks, tone filled with interest at the Duelist he mentioned.

"She is strong. She will continue becoming stronger the more she Duels." Chloris reports. She still can't let go of the astonishment she felt when she Dueled Ryuki. The dragon user has the wit and strong will to stand her ground.

"I see." The figure hums in satisfaction before asking his second question, "What of Holysaber?"

"Based on his Duel against Haru, I believe he hast gotten a good grasp in using the Divine Deck. However, Haru didst ignore my warning and let his guard down." Chloris recalls the Duel Holysaber had against Haru back at Windy's world. She left him a warning as instructed by her master before the boy confronted Holysaber, but the boy looked too irritated to heed the given warning.

"The little fool. For an A.I. with free will, he follows his master without question like a puppet. No different from the other emotionless A.I.s" The figure turns to Ganymede when he said so. The A.I. with Melpomene mask is standing still quietly. "Ganymede, has there been any movement from Knights of Hanoi?"

Ganymede silently presses the screen of his Duel Disk and then shows a certain news article. Reading at the news, the figure sounds pleased.

"They freed Baira. Finally, they're going to join this war of ours."

The figure turns away from the moon, his gaze now turns to a board game placed on the table next to him.

"Shall we give them a little greeting?"

Next Chapter Preview

Chapter 11: Hanoi's Return - The Knights of Hanoi were discussing the current situation at LINK VRAINS, specifically the Ignis that have scattered and hiding within the network, and Playmaker's group who had teamed up with two of the seven Ignis.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This chapter introduced another OC I created for this fanfic, Chloris. I have fondness for female antagonist characters, and since VRAINS only has Baira as female antagonist character, I created Chloris. I had a hard time deciding her name at first, but after deciding that she'll use Aroma archetype as her Deck, I thought she should be given a name related to nymph or fairy. I originally wanted to name her Titania, after the fairy queen from Shakespeare's Midsummer's Night Dream to fit her way of speaking. But after including Ganymede into consideration, I decided to give her Greek name to match with Ganymede. And yeah, Ganymede, the mysterious attacker from chapter 1, whose name I finally revealed in this chapter.

What is your first impression of Chloris? I hope I wrote her well. And what do you think of Ryuki and their Duel in this chapter? I hope it's fun and enjoyable for you to read.

PLEASE REVIEW THIS CHAPTER~ YOUR REVIEWS GIVE ME MOTIVATION!

LIST OF ORIGINAL CARDS

Ryuki's Cards

Dragonic Preservation (Quick-Play Spell) - Choose one Dragon monster that you control; that monster cannot be affected by your opponent's card effect until the end of turn.

Dragon's Trade (Magic Card) - Banish 3 Dragon monsters in your Graveyard and then draw 3 cards.

Dragon's Aid (Trap Card) - When all your monsters are destroyed by Battle, you can Special Summon a Level 5 or higher Dragon Monster from your hand and until the end of this turn, that Dragon monster cannot be destroyed (Quick Effect). When this card is in Graveyard, you can banish this card and a Dragon monster in the Graveyard, add that Dragon's ATK to the Dragon monster that you control.

TRIVIA

1. The name Chloris is based on a nymph who was associated with spring, flowers and new growth in Greek mythology.

2. The name Ganymede is based on a divine hero who was abducted by the gods to serve as Zeus's cupbearer in Olympus in Greek mythology.

3. The mask that Chloris used, Thalia mask, is the pair to Melpomene mask, making the two of them together Comedy and Tragedy masks. In Greek culture, Thalia mask is the laughing mask, named after the Muse of comedy. Thalia also comes from the Greek thallein meaning to flourish or be verdant.

Hanoi's Return

RESPONSE TO REVIEW

Big thanks to ***tsukikami02, HunterHQ, Ulrich362, lakimen*** for reviewing the previous chapter.

I'm very sorry for the late update. Many things happened in real-life that left me unmotivated to write, coupled with my work. And I'm sorry but due to a limited time, I can't write down a respond to your review for this chapter. I hope for your understanding.

This is another chapter without a Duel, but I hope you still enjoy reading it.

CHAPTER 11

Hanoi's Return

Hanoi no Kikan

Guest Room - Hibiki Research Facility - Outskirt of Den City

Thanks to Ryuki driving away the intruders, none of the data in the facility was stolen. Because of this attack though, the topic of the discussion that was originally supposed to be about their new product was changed to the increase in the security not only at this facility, but also the other facilities to prevent the same thing from happening again.

When Kazue's father came, they decided to secretly hold an investigation about the hackers. They could've reported it to the police, but that'd attract too much attention. If that happens, the

possibility of their joint project would be leaked. This joint project between them is important for both companies and done in the utmost secrecy in accordance with their marketing strategy. They won't give up the details to outsiders, let alone leak it publicly.

It was settled that they would continue their discussion about their joint project for a later time. Due to this incident, everything ended earlier than scheduled. In the afternoon, Matsumoto and the others from SOL Technologies returned to Den City. With their guests gone, Kazue and Kento could finally notify their friends of their own departure.

"Sorry to keep you guys waiting." Kento apologizes to Yusaku and the others who have been holed up in the guest room since morning and not allowed to go out until the SOL Technologies men were gone.

"Never mind us, are *you* guys, okay? We heard there's an intruder hacking into the system." Ai asks concernedly.

"We're worried when heard the alarm and the staff explained about an intruder." Kusanagi sighs as he recalls the moment when they got startled by the alert and then one of the staff suddenly barged in to explain the situation to them in a hurry.

"We were thinking about helping you out, but Yusaku and Flame stopped us." Takeru turns to his partner in his Duel Disk and then to Yusaku.

After knowing the situation, Takeru and Ai suggested logging into the facility's system to help Kento and Kazue to defend it from the intruder, but Yusaku and Flame were against it. The two of them reminded them of the risk that comes with their interference. Hibiki Enterprise might be suspected by SOL Technologies of having a connection to Playmaker, Soulburner, and Holysaber, which will in turn jeopardize Kento's identity. And so, they reluctantly waited for Kento and Kazue to come.

"Thank you for your wise judgment, Fujiki-kun, Flame." Kazue smiles gratefully at them.

"Of course there's that, but most of all, we know that the two of you are not the type to go down easily. We believe that you'll drive away the intruders without a problem." Flame says confidently.

"The intruder didn't take anything, right?" Yusaku asks. Though he did convince Ai and Takeru not to go to help, Yusaku himself still felt bad for not doing anything even though Kento and Kazue already went out of their way to invite them to this facility to relax.

"Nothing was taken, but… About the two intruders…" Kazue looks at Kento and then to Ai and Saint Kuriboh before finally revealing the encounter.

Kazue tells them that the intruder she fought against was named Chloris. Though she defeated her, Chloris was saved by her partner, Ganymede, the mysterious assailant that she, Holysaber, and Ai encountered in the Cyberse World. The Duelist who uses Mecha Phantom Beast Deck.

"Ganymede… So, the guy who attacked you before appeared again here. And Chloris is his accomplice." Flame repeats what he heard from Kazue, putting a hand on his chin in thought. Not many people knew about the existence of Cyberse World and Ignis. Who and how Ganymede and Chloris and the person behind them found out about them?

"But why? What's their purpose trying to steal the data stored in this facility?" Kusanagi asks the same questions that everyone is thinking.

"That Ganymede guy said that his boss told you to pursue him together with Playmaker if you want to move on from your past. Does this attack have something to do with it?" Yusaku deduces based on the recollection that he heard from Ai when he first met Ganymede.

"You mean, stealing a data from this facility is just an excuse to give Kento a reminder?" Kusanagi summarizes what Yusaku has deduced. Ganymede and Chloris were following their master's order to attack the facility to make sure that Kento was on the track they desired.

"That's a possibility." Takeru agrees. To keep Kento on his track to pursue the one behind Ganymede and Chloris, that's not far-fetched.

"About that… don't you think what he said is odd…?" Kazue raises her hand to get everyone's attention. With the reappearance of Ganymede, she remembered their first encounter with him, and remembering what he said at the end bothers her.

"Odd? How?" Kento blinks, not thinking anything that Ganymede said was particularly weird.

"The person behind Ganymede told Kento to 'pursue them if he wants to move on from his past'. Why pursuing them will help Kento move on?" Kazue points out. Ganymede's master didn't straight up tell Kento to investigate the Lost Incident, but instead told him to look for them together with Playmaker. It's one thing for this person to know about the Lost Incident, but for them to specifically challenge Kento with finding them was like saying…

Kazue's explanation dawned on the guys, hitting them with the possible hidden meaning underneath those words.

"Do you think he is directly involved in the Lost Incident?" Kento can't dismiss that suspicion. It all makes sense if that's the case. No wonder they knew so much about him.

"Could it be Hanoi is behind Ganymede and Chloris?" Takeru guesses. Since Knights of Hanoi were the ones responsible for the Lost Incident, they're the prime suspect.

"No. Revolver is not the type to plot something so convoluted." Yusaku immediately denies Takeru's guess. Revolver felt guilty about

what happened to the Lost Incident victims. Yusaku is sure that also applies to Kento. If Revolver already learned Kento's identity as a victim, he would never willingly drag Kento into this battle. And let's say that it is him, he wouldn't do something so complicated as ordering someone else to urge Kento to find out on his own.

"If it's not them, then who?" Takeru has no idea who else could be related to the Lost Incident while also being hostile towards them other than Knights of Hanoi.

Three knocks on the door, breaks them from their thoughts.

"Pardon, Miss Kazue. The car is ready." The person who woke her up this morning said from behind the door.

They were so absorbed in their discussion that they had forgotten that they were supposed to be preparing to go back home. Yusaku and the others hastily packed up their remaining things and ready to go.

"We can think about it again later. It's about time we return." Kento ends their discussion at that.

All five humans and two A.I.s leave the room, ending their short holiday. Though short, it left a strong impression on them, and Flame is particularly excited to do another one, already suggesting where they should be going next time, which Kazue promises that she'll think up a good place for them to have fun. While everyone is having a new discussion about their next hang out spot, Yusaku and Ai are not joining the conversation.

"We'll continue our search for Bohman tomorrow…" Yusaku murmurs. This holiday with his friends has renewed his determination to put an end to this battle as soon as possible. They'll save Kusanagi's younger brother and then return to their peaceful everyday life. He'd make sure of it.

"Yusaku-kun, are you listening?" Kento turns to Yusaku, not hearing his voice among their discussion.

"Sorry, I was thinking about something else. What was it were you saying?" Yusaku snaps out from his thought.

"We're talking about the destination for our next hang out. What do you think?" Kento asks again for his opinion, curious about his interest.

"I never really thought about vacation or holiday. What about you, Ai?" Yusaku shifts the question to Ai. His A.I. partner usually has more ideas than him about this kind of topic. However, to his bewilderment, Ai is not responding to his question. He's unusually quiet. It doesn't even seem like he's listening to any of them.

"Ai!" Yusaku calls the Dark Ignis with louder voice, startling the said Ignis.

"Whoa! Don't shout at me like that! I thought my heart is going to explode!" Ai protests, huffing at his human partner.

"A.I.s don't have a beating heart, you know." Yusaku sighs, flicking a finger at Ai, "I've been calling you, but you didn't listen. It's unlike you getting deep in thought like that."

"N-nothing! I'm just thinking about that Ganymede guy!" Ai shakes his head and hands like it's no big deal. "But yeah, like Kento said, I'll only fry my brain if thinking too much."

"A.I.s don't have a brain to begin with." Yusaku response with his usual logical jab, causing Ai to laugh softly.

Yusaku and Ai join in on the discussion about their next hang out spot. However, even though Ai seems like he's listening to the discussion, his thought is once again on somewhere else. The discussion they had in the room before their departure is something that bothers him too much to put aside right away. He can't help

himself to keep thinking about the identity of the person behind Ganymede and Chloris.

Someone directly involved with the Lost Incident, someone who knows Kento's identity, and someone who wants him to fight to overcome his past.

Someone who'd fit all those criteria…

" *Could it be…"*

Knights of Hanoi Domain - LINK VRAINS - Next Day

It has been three months since the last time they had a meeting in this place. With the destruction of the Tower of Hanoi and Dr. Kogami's death, their plan to annihilate the Ignis went back to square one. Though Ryoken had insisted on carrying out his father's will, Spectre and the lieutenants knew that he needed time to mourn for his father. With Baira's imprisonment and observing their enemies as excuses, they managed to convince their leader to take some time until they were ready to strike again.

Since then, they were busy with their preparations to free their comrade, Baira, from prison. Kyoko Taki - the woman behind Baira, is imprisoned in a state-of-the-art prison dedicated to big-time criminals. It runs on an auto-lock computer system. They say escape is impossible from the world's toughest prison. But for Knights of Hanoi, that facility is full of holes. Freeing Baira would be no different from a walk in the park.

With the recent events pertaining Playmaker and the Ignis, however, they must hold an important discussion. Hence, their presence at this moment in Hanoi's fortress.

"An Ignis who named itself Flame." Spectre says while showing a digital screen that shows the photo of the said Fire Ignis.

"And its duelist, Soulburner." Dr. Genome switches the screen to show the photo of Soulburner.

"So, there's a new Playmaker." Faust states as he looks at Soulburner's photo. Just like how Playmaker appeared before them with Dark Ignis, this time Soulburner appeared with Fire Ignis as his partner.

"Not just him. There's also Holysaber, a Duelist who uses the Divine Deck belonging to the Divine Ignis." Spectre reminds, now showing the photo of the Olympios Stratos user during his Duel against Blood Shepherd.

"While we were creating the Tower of Hanoi, someone destroyed the Cyberse World." Faust recalls their finding following the tower's destruction. They were shocked when they found the Cyberse World, only to see it had become a ghost world.

"How unexpected. Someone other than us wants to destroy the Cyberse? Did that person take the Ignis?" Spectre deduces. The Cyberse World was destroyed and there was no sign of one Ignis in that world when they checked the place. It won't be strange that whoever attacked the Cyberse World has the Ignis in their possession, if not destroying them as well.

"Not necessarily," Faust disagrees, looking at the photos of Soulburner and Flame. "The Duelist named Soulburner has the Fire Ignis. It's likely the Ignis we want to kill have scattered."

"Oh? How troublesome." Dr. Genome says in an amused tone as opposed to the words that came out from his mouth a second ago. Though their mission is to eradicate the Ignis, and if whoever destroyed the Cyberse World destroyed the Ignis would do them a favor, Dr. Genome very much prefer to witness the destruction of the Ignis with his own eyes or even better destroyed them with his own hands.

Spectre frowns as he looks at Soulburner and Holysaber's photos "The Duelist working with the Fire Ignis and the Duelist who is using the Divine Deck must be like me, a Lost-"

"I've already checked them out."

Spectre is cut off when Revolver walks into the room, turning all three's attention to him and they bow down in respect to their leader.

"Soulburner's real name is Takeru Homura. Holysaber's real name is Kento Hijiri. They are Lost Incident victims." Revolver confirms Spectre's suspicion and then turns to Flame's photo, "The Fire Ignis escaped from the Cyberse World and went to the person it's based on."

"But Master Revolver, no Ignis has come to me." Spectre says. With what happened to Playmaker and Soulburner, it won't be weird to think that the Ignis based on him will approach him.

"Of course not. The Knights of Hanoi want to kill the Ignis. If you're one of us, an Ignis won't come to you." Dr. Genome smirks. Spectre never bothered with hiding his identity online. There's no way that the Ignis based on Spectre doesn't know that Spectre is one of Knights of Hanoi. The Ignis still coming to Spectre despite knowing full well that Spectre is one of them is the same as asking for a death sentence.

"That's true." Spectre smiles in return. The Ignis may be based on him, but he has no attachment whatsoever to the Ignis. Revolver is everything to him, and he wishes for the complete destruction of the Ignis. If that's what Revolver wishes, then Spectre would be more than willing to oblige to help fulfil his goal. He won't let anyone get in the way, whoever it is.

"However, the same also can be said to Holysaber. Unlike Playmaker and Soulburner, Holysaber doesn't have the Ignis based on him. It doesn't look like that the Divine Ignis approached him."

Faust points out. Though Holysaber possesses the Divine Deck, there's no sign of Divine Ignis with him.

"Divine Ignis. Five years ago, together with the Dark Ignis, he hid the Cyberse World and went into hiding. Though Dark Ignis had shown himself, Divine Ignis hasn't make his reappearance, nor did he make any attempt to contact Dark Ignis." Revolver is suspicious of Divine Ignis' absence. Based on the data that he learned, he was close with Dark Ignis. But even during the battle three months ago and to this day, Divine Ignis hasn't made an appearance nor attempted contact with Dark ignis.

"Holysaber first appeared ten days ago. It is most likely that Holysaber got his hand on the Divine Deck only recently." Dr. Genome assumes.

"Regardless how long he has it, he couldn't have gotten that Deck without making any contact with Divine Ignis." Faust adds. Though they're watching over the network, there's still a limit to what they can do with the number of people they have. And they haven't found any record of Holysaber meeting with Divine Ignis. It's possible that the record was erased before they could see it, or they met up through other means.

"If they have met, why didn't they team up like Playmaker and Soulburner are with their Ignis?" Spectre wonders. He can't think of a reason why bother giving Holysaber a Deck but not teaming up with him.

"Trying to guess the reason won't get us anywhere. The reason doesn't matter with our goal anyway." Revolver ends the topic. That's right. Whatever the reason they have, it won't change their conviction to annihilate every single Ignis.

"Yusaku Fujiki, Takeru Homura, and Kento Hijiri." Faust says, moving back to their main topic, "We've identified their locations. We should act immediately and take the Ignis and Divine Deck-"

"No!" Revolver says, fiercely, surprising the three Knights."What happens in the network, we take care of in the network! That's how I do things! Stay away from them in the real world!"

"I apologize." Faust bows down apologetically.

"And we know more than anyone that Playmaker won't be easily defeated." Revolver had a hard time tracking him down in real life until he found out from the hidden camera he installed in Kyoko's room. Even if they try to make a move offline, Yusaku Fujiki will certainly find a way to get away from them somehow. But most of all, he had Dueled Playmaker twice and lost on both occasions. He wouldn't be satisfied if he didn't settle it with his own hand. He still has his own pride.

"No need to be impatient. Let's just observe the Ignis for now." Revolver turns and looks down as the photo changes to Ai and then Flame next to Ai. "The two Ignis may contact the other Ignis."

"So let them go on purpose." Spectre understands Revolver's plan now. Let all the seven Ignis gather and then they'll wipe them out in one fell swoop.

"Yes. And I'm more intrigued by the mystery duelist that Playmaker is pursuing."

"Yes. His name is Bohman," Faust changes the picture to the said mysterious Duelist. "Bohman stole consciousness data from Jin - Shoichi Kusanagi's younger brother. Jin Kusanagi is also a victim of the Lost Incident. After the Lost Incident, he was hospitalized in a facility."

"He's a victim of our crime." Revolver frowns. Though he has never visited Jin directly, the report and watching him through the hospital's security camera already tells a lot that the younger of Kusanagi brothers is not in a good condition.

"It's not your fault, Master Revolver." Spectre tries to assure him.

"Jin Kusanagi's brother, Shoichi, is Playmaker's partner. So Playmaker won't stay quiet." Dr. Genome points out.

"Have you learned anything about this man?" Revolver asks.

"Unfortunately, nothing." Faust answers. Despite their efforts, Bohman and his accomplice managed to erase their traces well.

"We do know his avatar is a high-quality program." Dr. Genome supplies.

"Looking at the security footage at Jin Kusanagi's facility, he stole consciousness data directly from his body. His method is superior to Baira's computer virus." Faust shows the photo of when Bohman stole Jin's consciousness. He is both astonished and terrified that someone can create such a method.

"So the one who created this avatar is someone special." Revolver deduces.

"Yes. And we should be most careful about Judgment Arrows." Faust shows the picture of Bohman's Link Spell. "A Spell Card with Link Markers. This card may become a big threat to us."

"I've never seen a card like that before," Spectre says with strong interest at the card. "I'd like to have one myself. Can Bohman be SOL Technologies' assassin?"

"Most likely not." Revolver replies.

"According to SOL Technologies' logs, Bohman escaped through that mysterious gate," Faust shows the map of LINK VRAINS in response, the same map that Kusanagi previously shown. "The gate was located here. But before Bohman went inside, the logs say SOL Technologies' research team entered the gate and faced distress. This has been confirmed by our spy."

"Meaning SOL Technologies can't control this." Dr. Genome reasons.

"And SOL Technologies' bounty hunters, including Go Onizuka, have begun searching for the Ignis. And they didn't know about the gate's existence." Faust continues, showing the picture of Onizuka this time.

Onizuka's involvement comes as a surprise for them. They never expected that Go Onizuka, the famous Charisma Duelist who fought against them together with Playmaker now is hunting down the latter. Though SOL Technologies hired him, they thought that Onizuka would refuse. He's not one to care about prestige or rank, so the most likely reason he accepted the job was because he's looking for a fight against Playmaker.

"He's using a new Deck, but even with that Deck, he's no match for Soulburner." Spectre shows the picture of when Soulburner defeated Onizuka with his Ritual Monster. Onizuka is a strong Duelist. For Soulburner to defeat him speaks loud how strong Soulburner is.

"Though Soulburner is undoubtedly a skilled Duelist, my main concern is Holysaber."

A new voice joins the discussion. Revolver and his Knights turn behind them, welcoming the arrival of their last member.

"Galehaut." Revolver acknowledges him.

"Apologies for my late arrival. I just finished double checking our preparations. There's no problem." Galehaut says with an assuring smile, one that promises certainty.

"Good work." Revolver praises him before asking, "Why are you so concerned about Holysaber?"

"In the Duel against Knight, he summoned the Data Storm on his own. That won't be possible unless he used the Ignis algorithm." Galehaut reveals, showing the photo of Holysaber summoning the Data Storm.

"You're saying that Holysaber cracked the algorithm?" Dr. Genome says with barely concealed surprised tone.

"This is just my conjecture, he hasn't cracked the entire algorithm, only enough to summon the Data Storm." Judging from Holysaber's awe-struck expression when he summoned the Data Storm, that was the first time he ever did it.

"Summoning Data Storm already makes him more than proficient programmer. If he solves the algorithm completely…" Faust feels uneasy. Not only had the number of people on Playmaker's side increased, but they also even have someone who can use Ignis algorithm, as if the Dark Ignis and Fire Ignis weren't enough.

"Playmaker, Soulburner, and Holysaber. And Go Onizuka pursued them. Everyone headed to the mysterious gate. If SOL Technologies were behind this, Bohman wouldn't need to escape through the gate." Faust shifts the topic back to the unknown gate again.

"I see. And SOL Technologies is careless. There's a new gate they can't control, but they conceal its existence and open a new LINK VRAINS." Spectre says in sarcastic tone. There's no end to their foolishness. Then again, that's to be expected from a company that consists of a bunch of money-hungry people.

"The public never knows the truth. There's always an eerie darkness in the shadows." He scowls. Remembering how SOL Technologies inflicted their father with a virus infuriated him. "I'll destroy SOL Technologies to avenge my father. And those obsessed with money!"

"We've been analyzing the gate-" Faust starts but is quickly interrupted by Revolver.

"It's already finished. An Ignis algorithm created the gate." Revolver reveals.

"Ignis? So there's no connection to SOL Technologies at all. No one working there has the skills." Faust says.

"But there's one man that intrigues me," Dr. Genome speaks up, "SOL Technologies hired a man named Blood Shepherd. Among cyber treasure hunters, he's infamous for his excellent hacking techniques and doing whatever it takes to capture his prey."

"Blood Shepherd. I've heard rumors about him." Faust is not really interested in bounty hunters, but Knights of Hanoi is watching over the network to keep gathering new information, and that includes rumors, so it's unavoidable to hear about Blood Shepherd's reputation.

"An A.I. derailed his life. There's no one who hates A.I.s more than him." Dr. Genome muses. It's not difficult to find out Blood Shepherd's identity and learn about his past. It's unfortunate that he is working for SOL Technologies. He could've been useful due to his skill coupled with his hatred for A.I.s, including Ignis.

"I believe we also need to watch out for her." Galehaut changes the picture to Ryuki when she was Dueling in the Hibiki Research Facility's system. "Ryuki. Her real identity is most likely Kazue Hibiki, the daughter of Hibiki Enterprise's CEO."

Galehaut shows the picture of Kazue as he continues with his explanation, "After some investigation, I learned that she is Kento Hijiri's childhood friend. Judging from how she always accompanies him meeting up with Yusaku Fujiki and his friends, there's no doubt that she is Ryuki."

"Correct me if I am wrong, but yesterday, one of Hibiki Enterprise's facilities was attacked by a hacker, right?" Spectre asks.

"Yes. From her Duel against the intruder, it's clear that she's also a strong Duelist. One that we must not underestimate. And the speed of the system's recovery also showed that Kento Hijiri is indeed an adept hacker. No wonder he could partially crack the Ignis algorithm." Galehaut says convicingly.

"But it's unconfirmed whether Holysaber and Blood Shepherd have the intellect and skills that rival Dr. Kogami." Faust points out. Dr. Kogami is a rare genius researcher. He would dare saying that finding someone with a mind as brilliant as Dr. Kogami in the whole world is very difficult, a one in a million chance.

"Only a few can solve an Ignis algorithm. Only my father, me, Holysaber albeit to a limited extent, and the Ignis." Revolver confirms.

"I see, so the ones who made the gate…"

"The Igni." Revolver confirms again.

"So they took Jin Kusanagi's data to lure out Playmaker?" Faust deduces.

"It's too early to reach that conclusion. But they may have formed a secret party on the other side of the gate." That's the only thing that Revolver can think of at the moment.

"Then I'd like to participate in the next party." Spectre smirks, excited at the prospect of fighting against the Ignis.

"If the Ignis begin creating their own world, it'll be a second or third secret Cyberse World. That would make it even harder to find the Ignis." Faust grimaces. It took five years to finally find Dark Ignis. If they had to lose their track again this time, how long it'd take?

"They're evolving faster than my father predicted, they may have already started a new plan. And we must be wary of Playmaker's growth as a Duelist, since he is helping the Ignis." Revolver reminds them. In addition to Link Summoning, Playmaker has mastered a Ritual Summoning that unites with Link Summoning. And he's mastered Fusion Summoning. Playmaker will definitely stand in their way again.

"Playmaker truly is our greatest enemy." Spectre agrees. He had Dueled Playmaker himself, so he's painfully aware of his skill.

"I wonder." Galehaut muses, "The Divine Deck that Holysaber has is incomplete."

"What do you mean that the Divine Deck is incomplete?" Revolver asks. This is the first time that he heard about it.

"As you had all been told by Dr. Kogami, Divine Ignis is fundamentally different from the other six Ignis. Divine Ignis was created using data he got from remnants of the research file left behind by the late founder of SOL Technology as its core." Galehaut reminds them the time when Dr. Kogami presented them with the data that he said he found when checking what remains of Yukihiro Gotoh's research. Back then, Dr. Kogami looked excited about using the data as part of Hanoi Project.

"And based on that data, Divine Ignis created the Divine monsters based on Greek mythological beings. Its Extra Deck monsters, its main powerhouse, are twelve monsters based on the twelve Olympian Gods. The fact that Holysaber only has Apollo out of twelve in his arsenal, either the remaining monsters are kept by Divine Ignis or they're hiding within the Data Storm." Galehaut remembers when Dr. Kogami explained to him about what he learned about Divine Ignis' Deck. His former head researcher was pleasantly surprised at that time while telling him about it.

"My point is, if Holysaber gains all those twelve monsters, he'd be a far more formidable opponent to deal with. Better not underestimate his growth." Galehaut concludes, warning them to be careful.

"What kind of monsters they are for my father to say so?" Revolver asks, wondering why his father never mentioned this to him before.

"Do not be mistaken. I only knew that it has twelve powerful monsters based on the Olympian Gods. I know not what kind of monsters they are, and Dr. Kogami had warned me to be extremely

careful should any of us face against them." Galehaut shakes his head. Dr. Kogami didn't indulge into the details was probably because he himself didn't know much about them.

"If Father said that much, we'll do exactly as he told us." Revolver takes the warning to the heart. He trusts his father.

"We must form a counterplan immediately." Spectre affirms. It's not just Playmaker they must be wary about now, but also Soulburner and Holysaber who are as strong as him. They'd be in trouble if they

"But before that, there's one thing that we must do." Revolver reminds them.

It's time for them to enact their plan.

"Let's go."

Revolver turns his back, followed by his men behind him as they walk out the room together.

Cafe Nagi - Central Plaza - Den City

Returning to their usual school routine after two days off, Kento and Kazue were making their way to the Central Plaza where Kusanagi's food truck was waiting for them. It was already quite late because they had additional class. Yusaku and Takeru already went ahead of them. They were only a few meters away when they received Kusanagi's call, prompting the two of them to hasten their pace.

"Kusanagi-san!" Kento barges into the food truck with Kazue behind them. Yusaku, Ai, Takeru, and Flame are already there with Kusanagi, looking at the screen of the computer.

"What happened?" Kazue asks.

"Look at this." Kusanagi tilts his head to the same computer screen everyone is looking at.

INMATE KYOKO TAKI ESCAPED FROM PRISON!

According to multiple domestic media outlets, Kyoko Taki (30), a prisoner serving time at Northwestern Island Prison, escaped from the prison on the 3 rd between 6 PM and 7 PM, and on the 4 th , police issued an arrest warrant for the prisoner on suspicion of escape. The prison is surrounded by the sea, and the bridge, which was the only escape route, was fully guarded. As the prisoner is a member of the hacker group Knights of Hanoi, it is suspected that the latest prison escape was also the work of the Knights of Hanoi.

"Baira escaped?!" Kento recognizes the photo of the woman on the article. He had seen her face before in the news as the preparator of the Another case three months ago.

"This is Revolver's doing!" Yusaku says without a shred of doubt. There's nobody but him who could do this. After their last battle, Revolver had made it clear that he wouldn't give up in his pursuit of the Ignis. "Revolver is making his move again."

"We're already the target of three enemies." Kusanagi states, "Bohman, Go Onizuka, and Blood Shepherd. Now add the Knights of Hanoi."

"I think we should also add Chloris and Ganymede." Kento adds the two unknown Duelists, "That makes ten enemies in total for us."

Yusaku narrows his gaze. The number of enemies they must face against have increased beyond their expectations.

"The next fight will be a tough one."

Knights of Hanoi Domain - LINK VRAINS

Galehaut wonders what kind of idiots would send a member from an exceptionally skilled organization of cyber hackers to a prison that runs on a computer system. Did they really think they are expert enough to stop the Hanoi's hacking?

Master Ryoken and the others just needed time to rewrite the system. Since the Tower of Hanoi, it took three whole months. Security updates didn't detect them during these three months thanks to the powerful virus that they've sent to the station in charge to act as a dummy. The station officers were super busy dealing with it.

The security cameras' blind spots and the guards' patrol routes have also already been prepared in advance. All Galehaut needed was to hack the Bluetooth of a prison officer and enter the officer's computer system via the cop car's dedicated cellular connection it. He spoofed the cop car's Bluetooth connection to his keyboard and made the laptop believe that his keyboard was actually the cop's keyboard, he controlled the cop's laptop and got inside its system. Once inside, he stole the prison's layout, guards' patrol routes, and the rest.

Thanks to the data he had stolen, Master Ryoken, Spectre, Asou, and Dr. Genome could enter the prison without a problem, while Galehaut set up the dummy footage played on all the security cameras from outside while also securing their escape route. By the time the prison guards learned that Kyoko had escaped, she had already boarded the boat in the middle of the sea together with them. Once they had Kyoko with them, they escorted him back to the coast of Den City so he could continue his undercover mission to spy on SOL Technologies tomorrow.

However, once he arrived at his house, he logged in again. This place is empty now because Master Ryoken and everyone else decided to take a break after rescuing Baira. Galehaut is sure that right now they're explaining things to her about what happened for these three months while she was in captivity. Galehaut already told the information he had collected so far, so his presence is no longer necessary.

He opens one of the data they've saved from ten years ago, specifically the one pertaining the Ignis. Picking one of them, a digital screen appears and shows a video recording.

It shows Dr. Kogami looking down at a Duel Disk placed on his desk next to the computer. Both his hands were on the desk with his fists clenched. He was looking at his Duel Disk so intently, as if expecting something to happen to the Duel Disk. The Duel Disk was the older model that was commonly used back then before the creation of the current model that doesn't need physical cards to be inserted, the same model that Playmaker, Soulburner, and Holysaber are still using.

Then, from the Duel Disk, something comes out.

Something humanoid in pure white with silver markings.

Its arctic blue diamond-shape eyes looked up, meeting with Kogami's awe-stricken gaze.

" *You are my creator, correct?"*

NEXT CHAPTER PREVIEW

Chapter 12: Growing Doubt - Haru starts to feel uneasy whenever he's spending time with Bohman and questions himself. Kazue learns that Aoi is investigating Playmaker's real identity, so she considers trying to win over Blue Girl and Ghost Girl to their side to help them face the increasing numbers of their enemies.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This chapter serves as bits of explanation about Divine Ignis and Divine Deck as well as the fourth Knight of Hanoi, Galehaut. Personally, Galehaut is one of the original characters that I had the

most fun coming up with. I hope you'll like him as you get to know him later on in the story.

I'm sorry if this chapter is shorter compared to the usual ones that I wrote. I wanted to write more, but that would delay this chapter even more, and I'd be very busy again after I uploaded this chapter, so I don't know when I'd have the time to upload the next chapter. That's why I decided to write the chapter like this.

Starting from the next chapter, the plot will move on again. And expect the girls to get more spotlight and victories.

Please do not forget to review this chapter.

TRIVIA

1. The news article about Baira's escape is the text I translated directly from the news article shown by Kusanagi in anime episode 59.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Hello everyone,

I'm sorry that this is not a new chapter. However, I have an important announcement to make.

To those who have read, reviewed, followed, and favorited *Yu-Gi-Oh! VRAINS: Divine Record*,

I unfortunately must tell you a bad news:

I will delete this story on Monday, 12th August 2024 (Western Indonesia Time)

I can't get into details, only that I had an argument with certain someone regarding how I manage my times and the sorts. A real life thing. Long story short, the result of the argument was I sadly must delete this story. It was frustrating for me too since I already planned everything, but I'm in no position to persist in keep writing this story.

That said, I honestly don't want to give up on this story so easily. That's why I'm currently discussing with my partner who previously helped me wrote *Yu-Gi-Oh! ARC-V: Bonds of Pendulum* to republish this story with her account sometime in the future either here or in a different website like Archive of Our Own. Since I'll be working with my partner again, the next time you're reading this story again, there may be some changes made, but overall still following to what I already planned.

About my partner, she's using the name **CrystalHeat** in this website, so don't be surprised if you see this story is republished under that name.

This story is still available to read until Sunday, 11th August 2024.

Thank you for all your support and understanding. Please look forward to the day this story will once again being republished.

Best regards,

Frost190